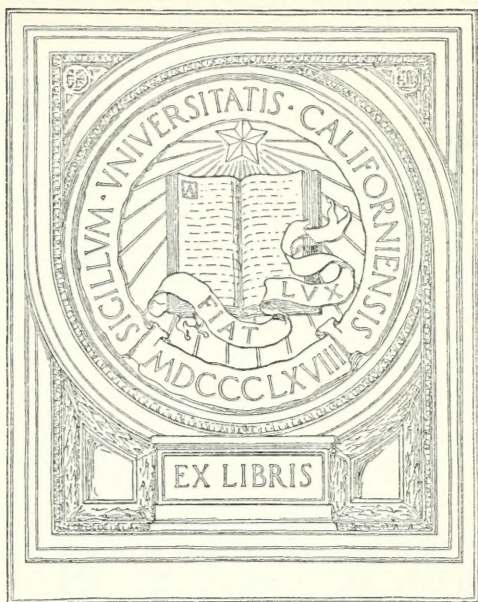


Colette



*Jeanne
Schultz*

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



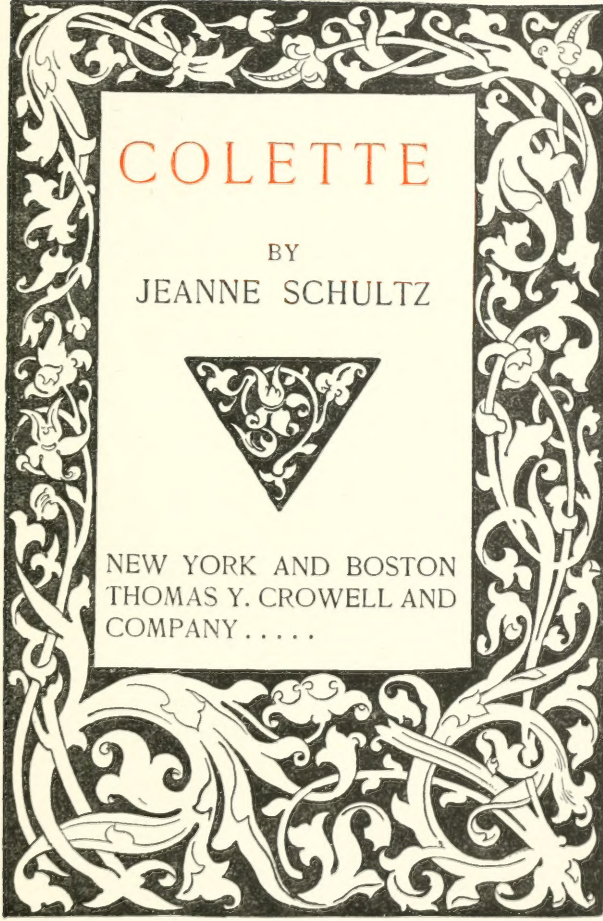
THE GIFT OF
MAY TREAT MORRISON
IN MEMORY OF
ALEXANDER F MORRISON



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COLETTE

BY
JEANNE SCHULTZ



NEW YORK AND BOSTON
THOMAS Y. CROWELL AND
COMPANY



COLETTE

BY

JEANNE SCHULTZ

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

EDITH V. FLANDERS

NEW YORK: 46 EAST 14TH STREET
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY

BOSTON: 100 PURCHASE STREET

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COLETTE.

I.

MARCH 1, 18-

FROM dying of despair and ennui preserve me, O Lord! and do not forget me in this snow which piles every day a little higher around me!

I have formulated this ejaculatory prayer so many times without ever receiving any response that, at last, fairly wearied, I write it. Written things have more weight, it seems to me; and besides, it takes more time to write them. And I am in the habit of speaking aloud instead of quietly thinking; for, to pronounce a word loudly and make it resound against the great wainscoting of my room occupies me longer, and for this reason I begin to write to-day. But alas! what shall I find for to-morrow? . . .

My writing-materials are not elegant, not even sufficient indeed, and there is not the smallest secret drawer in which to conceal my note-book! The ink was dry in the bottle that I found; all my pens are lost, and I have never had a sheet of paper here. Why should I have any, since I write to no one?

It is impossible to go down to the village. There

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I

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MAR 27 1913

GIFT OF MRS. A. F. MORRISON

are six feet of snow in the roads, to say nothing of the drifts and holes where the wind has heaped up the snowflakes to such heights that a coach might be engulfed from the axle-tree up to the tilt. . . . I have indeed read in many books how prisoners prick a vein in order to write with their blood upon a pocket-handkerchief; but I no longer believe it, for the linen absorbs it all, and it is not legible. I know, for I have tried it!

With a little water, however, my ink is restored; I have borrowed two feathers from the tail of a goose, which has very patiently allowed them to be taken, poor creature; and, after overturning the contents of the chests and cupboards, I have found this great parchment note-book, yellow as saffron, and thick as a board, of which, fortunately, only one side of the pages has been used. The other side remains for me; and then I also have the advantage of reading as I go on, what has been written already. These writings are the quarrels and law-suits of a M. Jean Nicolas with a lady of *Haut-Pignon*, about some warrens, the rabbits of which were destroying the clover, and about boundary changes injurious to his fields. . . .

Mon Dieu! give me a neighbor like Jean Nicolas, a quarreller and a fault-finder; and boundaries that afford scope for disputes to occupy my solitude!

Are there many people, I wonder, who exactly understand the signification of that word, "solitude," and who think sometimes of all that it means? "Sol-

tude," explains the dictionary, "solitude, the state of a person who is alone." And above, for the word "alone," it adds very judiciously in order to complete its meaning: "Alone, one who is without company, who is not with others."

And that is all,—no comment,—no explanation,—no distinction,—nothing to indicate that it expresses one of the most detestable torments of existence; nothing suggestive of degrees, nothing to show that there is solitude, and solitude, and that the most cruel is not that of the Carthusian monks in their cells of five feet square, in whose silence and gloom they have chosen to live; not even that of the Trappists in the little garden where they dig their graves from one year's end to another while exchanging encouraging words: but mine, that of Colette d'Erlange, who has not chosen her life, and who is almost desirous of no longer enduring it! . . .

Alone at eighteen years of age, with a brain full of ideas, and not a possibility of making them known to a single living ear; alone to laugh, alone to weep, and alone to fall into a passion:—it is enough to make one lose one's mind. . . .

During the summer, and even the autumn indeed, it was supportable: the trees and the flowers say and know much more than many people suppose. Lying in the woods upon a bed of moss I heard a hundred voices that talked with me every day, and the little insects that ran over my cheeks made me laugh all

by myself. Or again, I mounted (as long as she had any strength) the old *Françoise*, the mare which turns the wheel of the well, and my great dog took me upon his back to finish the ride when she could do no more, my good "Un," with his beautiful shaggy, black hair, in which, at this moment, my feet bury themselves up to the ankles while he watches me write. Then, in the evening, I had the stars. I confided in all those that can be seen in our corner of the world, and when I was relating to them my weariness, more than one made a pitying sign which replied to me from above like the glance of a friendly eye.

But this wind which has blown for six weeks, this snow which prevents my going out, and this voice of my aunt which sounds like the north-east wind, and which bites a little stronger every day, all this nearly drives me to despair.

There is no imagination that could resist this; I am at the end of the tales which I relate to myself, and I am afraid that there is no longer anything left in my brain, and that, when the time comes to knock at its door and demand aid from it in some extraordinary adventure, I shall find only a great cavity! For I shall have my adventure some day and I could even say that I know it already.

My hero is tall, somber, with black hair, heavy eyebrows, and severe eyes. His complexion is dark, his speech is imperious, and there is in his glance a

singular light, oriental in its sweetness, but oriental also in a severity cold as the blue steel of cimeters or like the memory of some terrible past ; for my hero, in order to come to me, will be obliged to traverse some strange roads, perhaps.

His mustache will be silky, a simple black line slightly bristling : — and all this will lighten for me alone, with a gentle and unexpected smile.

Will he come to me in the midst of the fields, in the gayety of the morning, or in the peace of evening ? Naturally, or in some extraordinary way ? I do not know ; but I know assuredly that he will come.

It seemed to me more likely, and certainly more agreeable, that I should meet him during the days of May or June ; and in those months I never passed near a hedge without observing it closely lest my hero should be concealed behind it ; but I still hope for him, and each morning, while raising my curtain, I look carefully for the imprints of two feet in the snow under my window.

When I find that no one has come, I excuse him to myself. The weather is so severe ! The paths are in such a bad condition ! I intend that he shall come to me with his four limbs intact ; so I praise him for not risking a sprain in order to present himself to me a day sooner, and resign myself, sighing, to await a to-morrow that has not yet come.

Then, if my faith in the future becomes too greatly shaken, I go and hunt out one of those great volumes

which fill the library, and with which I amuse myself on rainy days, and read in what diverse and always marvellous ways the princesses in times past who found themselves shut up in ruined towers contrived to escape. Between them and myself I find a striking analogy, and since we resemble each other so much in the first instance, I only ask that my imprisonment may have a like termination. In fact, if the tower in which I dwell does not tumble down of itself to set me free, as the one upon the east and the one near by have already done, — and my own may follow them at any moment, — there is in the wainscoting of my room a door that opens upon a secret staircase, and I am the owner of two large, well-formed eyes, very brilliant, and quite as suitable to recompense a hero as any that have ever shone.

This is said without arrogance and without conceit, for I have never understood the distinction which allows one to exclaim very loudly: What a fine horse! What a beautiful rose! But which prohibits severely the same observation when made upon a face in the formation of which one has had nothing whatever to do, simply because it is his own.

It is permitted, and even approved, when one speaks evil of his own nose, or declares that his eyes are squinting; but if he foolishly asserts that the good God has placed them straight, . . . horrible! it is a thing touching which each one should preserve the most perfect ignorance; as if the small-

est corner of a mirror, or the tiniest stream could not reveal it to you without the help of any one! . . .

If a girl bends down, and looks, she cannot help seeing that she is pretty; is that a crime? and must she stir up the water in order that the waves may distort her face? . . . The stags and the hinds that came down this summer to drink while I lay dreaming in my concealment close by, used the water for a mirror. Having quenched their thirst they remained there awhile without stirring, with bent heads, and their gentle eyes fixed upon their reflections; then they went away with a bound, very innocently happy to know that their coats were of so charming a brown and their great horns so well formed. After they left, I leaned over and saw all that they had seen upon the same blue back-ground, with the same masses of clouds which passed quickly by in white and gray spots, and when like them I went skipping away, it was not less pleasing for me to think of my reflection.

My portrait however can be painted in two words, and recalls that of the Gypsies of all countries: for my eyes are black and my cheeks tanned, only I believe them white underneath, and there yet remains a trace of it. My nose, which is a little short, gives me the appearance of a person so desirous of seeing the world that he has not taken the time to finish himself before entering it; and yet, God knows, there has been time enough for that in the life which

I lead here; and my mouth is like all mouths . . . which are not too ugly. My only grief is the color of my hair, a blond so red that it is more red than blond, and with some unequal locks which end in the middle like the stripes on a country-woman's skirt.

If one must believe my aunt's words, I shall never be tall; and she has a way of murmuring when I find myself near her, "*petite femme!*" which gives me a painful feeling of littleness. The truth is I come just up to her elbow, and as I do not know a single man in the country who goes beyond her shoulder, the disproportion quite satisfies me. . . . And it is acting and thinking thus, that I await in my ivy-wreathed tower, the base of which is lost in the snow, my liberator and my hero.

II.

MARCH 2d.

ONE thing of which I often think, though I have never dared to ask my aunt about it, is the nature of the connection that binds us together. Does she live with me, or do I live with her? Is it she who has received me into her manor-house, or I who shelter her in my ruins? And the two towers and the four walls which remain standing, and which have still strength to bear their name "Erlange de Fond-de-Vieux," do they belong to Mlle. d'Épine, or to Mlle. d'Erlange? . . .

As far back as my memory can go, we have always been together, she and I, as we are to-day. She, so cold, so dry, and so tall, eternally shut up in the largest room in the castle, on the side where the sun shines, and the wind does not blow: and I, left to grow up as I like, either out-doors or in-doors, in the cold or in the rain, without her taking the least notice of it. Besides us two, only Benoîte, who is cook, farmwoman, butler, and gardener combined, and who is also my only friend, except Françoise at the well wheel, turning at the same pace, though perhaps a little more agile formerly than now.

Then came my two years at the convent, those

two adorable years, when people talked with me and called me by my name ; when my bed lay between a dozen other little white beds, all alike, beneath whose coverlets I enjoyed such happy whisperings which required only a sign to arouse ; — years during which I learned so many things, if not all they taught us in the hours of class. My convent, where I swore eternal friendships, where I was shown how to twist up my hair, and how to open a fan ; where I knew for the first time what one calls an ideal, and how necessary it is that a man, in order to be a hero, should be dark, pale, a little old, gloomy, and sarcastic ! . . . Who will give me back the charming hours of my convent ? . . .

However high the walls might be, not all the noise of Paris died outside of them, and on reception days there entered some profane puffs which made their way to us, and were food for conversation during the entire week. Oh ! those mysterious colloquies in the woods of the park, which protected us like the most impenetrable of jungles, but where the rustling of the dry leaves caused us to leap to our feet and scamper away in a moment ; and those games of hide-and-seek about the pedestals of the statues to escape those nuns who had the reputation of being so severe and yet had such gentle voices ; and those foolish notes which went from desk to desk under the form of geographical instruction, where shall I ever find anything so charming ? . . . The Mediterranean signified

one person, and the Baltic sea another, and we made them do and say things which would have overturned in one instant all the laws of nature. Besides the notes, there were the gifts, great favor knots, blue or scarlet, pinned upon white paper adorned with devices and designs, which were the sign of a tenderness or a preference that made the heart beat.

Then one day my aunt suddenly appeared for the first time since she had brought me there, and without a word of warning carried me off again.

"Your education is finished," said she, without any preamble, "and since you have not succeeded in making a suitable provision for your future during these two years, you must return to Erlange."

Return to Erlange! I was stupefied. It seemed to me that I was being suddenly pushed into a tomb, and that a great stone was being laid upon me while I was still breathing. . . . "But, aunt," said I, distractedly, "do not think, do not think that I know everything yet: it is quite the contrary, because spelling . . . calculus . . . history . . ." I stammered, I could find nothing more to say, I should in truth have been glad not to know how to talk that I might give her the idea of leaving me there to learn again *b-a ba* in my alphabet. . . . But she was not disturbed by such a trifle, and, cutting my words short in her habitual manner, "If you know nothing, niece," said she, drily, "then you have spent a very unprofitable two years here, and I should

consider it wrong to leave you an hour longer ! It is your own fault, and the result will be that to your position of a girl without a dowry you will add the charm and attraction of an uneducated girl, and that will not make your way in life any easier. But, thank God, I shall not have these things upon my conscience, for I have done my duty in giving you the opportunity of acquiring a good education."

She rose at the same time with a decision which put an end to the conversation, and threw me into a despair so deep that I remember crying out, almost against my will :

"And if I had a religious vocation, aunt ?"

"In that case," she replied, turning quickly around with a singular smile, "I would leave you here indeed." She hesitated a little, then, walking toward the door without looking at me, "You have twenty-four hours to reflect upon that !" added she, and vanished like a bad dream.

Twenty-four hours gained ! It seemed to me that I had peace forever, and the head-dress and veil of our nuns seemed to me almost pretty when I thought that those were the things perhaps, which were going to snatch me from exile !

Although the prohibition was clear in this respect, I hastened to the dormitories in the first moment of leisure, and in a turn of the hand, with two white handkerchiefs and my black woollen apron, I arranged upon my head the above-mentioned head-dress.

Without doubt I looked better in my ordinary costume, but there was nothing repulsive in my appearance, and the white band above my eyebrows and eyes made them appear longer and blacker, I thought. That was the first point, the most important in any case, and my resolution was taken irrevocably. During the rest of the day I gave myself up entirely to the austerities to which my new life condemned me, and, charged with a commission for the Infirmary, which was situated at the other end of the park, I managed, without being seen, to make the journeys there and back with bare feet. I suffered from no other injury than some insignificant bruises; and more and more certain of my vocation, I passed a part of that night, I remember, kneeling at the foot of my bed, pressing against my breast a bunch of little keys, a closed knife, and an ivory paper-cutter, which I had attached to my neck in the way of discipline, and whose sharp points pricked my skin.

Twice, as the inspector passed, I was obliged to jump quickly into my bed, and the clinking of the keys drew her near me and caused her to bend over me a long time; but she heard so even a respiration, and saw my eyes so tightly closed, that she thought she had imagined the noise and so went away.

When I awoke the following day the convent was in confusion. An Archbishop, who was shortly expected and who was to invest five novices with the

veil, had suddenly announced himself that morning, having been obliged to take an unexpected journey, and hasty preparations were being made for the ceremony.

"It is delightful," said I to myself, earnestly striving to smooth my hair which kept curling in spite of all the water that I employed, "heaven is giving me all manner of proofs, and I shall be able to reply positively to my aunt this evening and with a full knowledge of what I am doing." It was not possible however to speak in private with the Superior that morning, and that I was quickly sent back to the dormitory was due to my attempts at simplicity. "You have dressed your hair in drops of water, it is adorable!" said one of my companions to me at the moment when we were putting ourselves in line, and almost at the same instant I heard the voice of sister Agatha but in a tone much less encouraging:

"Mademoiselle d'Erlange!" she cried imperiously, "have you soaked your head in the fountain? Go dry your hair and dress it again, I beg you!" Once up stairs, I took an account of the effect. My hair fell in the most beautiful corkscrew ringlets, and the water had collected in drops at the ends of the curls and a little everywhere. This was not ugly certainly, but it was a little odd, and I quickly dried this unseasonable decoration, which might almost be mistaken for diamonds.

My exaltation increased until the middle of the ceremony; the flowers, the lights, the five young

girls clothed in white, their great satin skirts sweeping the floor of the chancel, excited my fervor until I was impatient to be among them. At a distance, I saw the congregation; and in the first row I noticed a tall young man, an officer in uniform, who appeared to me to be red about the eyes. Was this a lover who had come to look for the last time upon his dear one? Some report of this kind had circulated among us, and this seemed to me the height of romance. . . .

But when they brought in five open coffins, and when the brides of the moment, dressed this time as nuns and hidden under great black veils, stretched themselves in them to hear the office of the dead sung, my resolution quickly changed; I drew my keys hastily from my bosom and went away without listening to anything more, in order to prepare myself and my baggage in all haste.

At the stated hour I was in the parlor, my traveling bag in my hand, my eyes swimming from my good-bys, and my hands encumbered with a profusion of portraits and gifts; but so resolute that Erlange appeared to me in the distance in a halo of glory, and I hastened towards the door as soon as my aunt entered.

"Well!" said she, with a gesture of surprise, "what does this mean?"

"I am ready to go." I replied briefly, without paying any attention to a well-marked shade of disappointment on her face, which came back to my mind later on.

I burst again into tears while embracing the Superior, and seeing everything as in a humid mist, I passed out of the door. "For the East station," said my aunt as she got into the carriage, and two hours afterward we were whizzing along the railroad, in a silence worthy of the five new nuns who had, so unconsciously, just driven me from the house of the Lord.

At the station at which we stopped, the yellow wagon which carried passengers to the village was waiting only for us ; my aunt pushed me toward it with a gesture, and as if involuntarily conquered by her silence, I indicated to her, by a movement also, my preference for the seat on top. "No, no !" said she, in a dry tone, "henceforth you will never leave me." Françoise and the cabriolet were waiting for us at the village, and that same evening, still dazed by the sudden change, I found myself once more within the four walls of my room, from which, I noticed with lively astonishment, all the furniture had been removed.

In that darkness my candle looked like a funereal taper ; my footsteps resounded as in a church ; and, finding myself suddenly so abandoned and so lost, I did the only reasonable thing in my power, and, seated upon the floor, with my two arms about my valise, began to shed afresh the tears which I had believed exhausted in the morning, but whose generous source reopened itself just in time. When this was done, I arose in order to open my window to a ray of

moonlight which was knocking upon the panes, and noticing for the first time how exceedingly black and deep the valley was which isolated us from the surrounding country : "*Mon Dieu!*" I could not prevent myself from crying aloud, "Who will ever come to take me away from here?" And a kind little voice, which I still hear from time to time, replied in my ear, "He; be calm!" And thus it is that I wait for him each day, that I excuse him each morning, and that I hope for him without ceasing.

III.

MARCH 3.

DECIDEDLY there is some enjoyment in writing, and I take more pleasure than I could have believed possible in the note-book of Jean Nicolas.

When I am before it, pen in hand, I forget everything else, and it seems to me that I am relating my sorrows to some compassionate soul. I imagine that I have near me a deaf mute, and that the slate and pencil are the necessary adjuncts of our intimacy, and I scribble, I scribble ! . . .

Far from Jean Nicolas, I store up all the ideas that come to me, and when on my return to my room I begin to speak to him, I find that one thing brings in its train another, and that after having said to him this, I am obliged to add that, lest he no longer understand my affairs !

Then I am compelled to relate to him more and more of my past life, turn the pages, water the ink, and the sacrificial goose must prepare new offerings in case the present weather lasts some days ! . . .

I had yielded myself up to despair for the first few days and, thinking of the words with which my aunt had received me in the reception-room, I was struck particularly by a certain phrase : " Since you have

not succeeded in making a suitable provision for your future during these two years," she had said to me. . . . Had she then sent me to the convent to find a husband, and did she imagine that over there they pushed their care of us so far as to favor our matrimonial designs by bringing us in contact on Thursday and on Sunday with young men of good family and proper age, who talked with us while we played at battledore and shuttlecock?

The simplicity would have been great, and I could not imagine this sentiment finding shelter and nourishment in the brain of such a woman; but the affair was worth clearing up, and, notwithstanding the time it had taken for this idea to make its way into my mind, and above all, in spite of the strong and perhaps cowardly fear of my aunt which I had felt ever since I was in swaddling clothes, I decided to question her about the matter.

From the very short explanation which we had upon this subject dates my complete knowledge of her character, as well as some slight glimpses of her past life which I gathered, and of which she never speaks, apparently not finding any pleasing reminiscences to evoke. This slight accident has, moreover, allowed me to discover several things concerning the future that she reserves for me and which she prepares in her own way, and in a manner quite contrary to my personal plans. I trouble myself little about it, however, and leave her to her arrangements, feeling

myself quite able to overthrow them when the time comes.

Aurore-Raymonde-Edmée-d'Épine has never known herself to be anything but ugly, whatever period of her existence she may please to call up ; and while looking at her, I have in vain tried to imagine her without wrinkles, without mustaches, without pimples, without all that which age has given to her ; indeed, there are some traits which time has been able neither to increase nor to diminish in spite of all its power.

Benoite, moreover, is a witness to it, and she certifies to this ugliness, fabulous as legendary, from the cradle ; even then this doll in swaddling clothes and a frilled bonnet had already found a way of resembling no one else ! . . .

The saddest thing is that the misfortune did not end there, and that the character and the disposition which govern this face exceeded in disagreeableness all that one could conjecture or believe.

Did this gloomy moroseness arise from the consciousness of being so ugly, or, on the contrary, did this ugliness chiefly consist in an habitually bitter expression ? . . . No one would have been able to answer the question positively, any more than that of a bad stomach and bad teeth. "Which has spoiled the other ?" one involuntarily wondered on seeing her. It is certain that both were equally spoiled. But whatever reason you advance in excuse

for this misfortune, — there is no fixed law about the matter. — one has often seen ugly people who were very amiable. “Beauty and the Beast” confirm it, and the contemporaries of my aunt declare. — Benoite assures me, — that they were more often repelled by the disagreeable things which she said to them than by the very ugly mouth from which they came ; for relatives, friends, and strangers suffered without distinction, and one can easily imagine her symbolical name of Épine (*Thorn*) being made the subject of jokes and comparisons by the youth of her day.

One can readily understand from this that a creature who unites in herself to such an extreme degree so many diverse faults, had a spring-time quite without charm. She repelled instinctively ; and my mother, some years younger than she, had been married for a long time while my aunt was still waiting for the being who would prove sufficiently courageous to snatch her from celibacy. From this unrealized hope, which she had tenaciously held as long as possible, a bitterness and an intolerable humiliation have always dwelt with her. And an intense rancor is all that finds a place in her heart.

Changes have been wrought by death and time, but her spite remains unchanged ; and I ought to add that she cherishes and cultivates her harshness with a care such as she has never bestowed upon anything else. It is her cat, her parrot, her lap-dog, the favorite animal of her solitary life, and I would never

say anything against this occupation, although it may be slightly unchristian perhaps, if the little tiger which she thus nourishes had not nails and teeth and did not make use of them on every occasion.

What is most curious is that this resentment, so profoundly bitter, instead of turning, as it naturally ought, against the authors of the evil, is directed entirely against women happier than herself who have been able to obtain all that she has desired, and upon those she thinks capable of procuring it in their turn !

Has she thought that in sin it is necessary to look at the cause more than the effect, and does she find the thief who takes the fruit less culpable than the apple or the peach which tempts him by its insolent beauty ? Or, is this partiality the last vestige of a weakness ill-recompensed in former years ? I do not know, having done nothing else but suffer the effects of this bizarre system of compensation. In this respect her rancor would of course be complimentary, but there is a kind of compliment the constant repetition and form of which is not desirable ; and I think that my mother, from all that I can learn of her life, would have willingly bought a little peace at the sacrifice of many of her charms.

This mighty anger of my aunt's extended itself, moreover, to all classes of society, as well as to all ages. The report of a wedding coming up to us from the village would put her beside herself, and

in her rare walks if chance placed in her way a betrothed couple or some young husbands and wives perhaps a little too absorbed in each other, you may believe that they would never forget the look which followed them.

To sum it all up, that which she desired above all else was that her fate and her ennui might be the fate of all, and very logical in that, she had a tenderness and characteristic care for the ugly, the unfortunate, the overlooked ones, all those who seemed to her self-love to be companions in misfortune.

But let one of them marry, and the charm was immediately broken! . . . Such is my aunt and such are the singular causes of the life which I lead with her.

What catastrophe gave me up as a child to this hard heart, I only half know; but I believe that the death of my father, which was very sudden, was the cause from which my poor mother herself died very soon after.

My Aunt Aurore was the only member of the family left (I say Aurore, for by a bitter irony, it is the only one of the three names which has survived) and the care of the orphan fell to her; but from the manner in which she bore her charge, the weight of it must have been very light, for she seemed to simply ignore me up to the time when, I do not know by what awakening, it suddenly came into her head that the traditional enemy had entered her home in my person, and that, by a sufficiently natural transformation, the little girl would one day be a woman. If it was not

exclusively this idea which determined our departure for Erlange, at least the true reason and this one were very closely allied to each other, for I was scarcely ten years old when she transplanted me suddenly into this isolated place, where, however, everything charmed me.

Here passed the nebulous change from my chrysalis state, a change followed by my aunt with an eye which I should like to style friendly but in which I fear rather an anxious curiosity dominated. What would come forth, indeed, from this tanned skin, from these brown eyes, from these feet and hands which did not cease growing? . . . The doubt was permissible! . . .

Unfortunately there came forth from it what I have already said, and the day on which I finally freed myself from the chrysalis state my aunt conducted me straight to the convent.

My poor mother, who undoubtedly foresaw my future, had exacted from her sister the promise that during at least two years of my life as a young girl, I should live at Paris. And this was the ingenious fashion which the latter found of executing this command from the tomb without crossing her own wishes. Not for anything in the world would she have failed in her word, I am certain of that, but she clothed it in this garb without the slightest scruple, and remained satisfied that I had seen of Paris all that was proper for me to see.

Time passed: she came to take me from my worldliness, and she brought back to Erlange this niece whom no one desired and who, by the grace of God, will walk perhaps in her steps.

Understanding this, one can judge if my proposition of never leaving the convent was agreeable to her ! . . . A nun !—it was the conciliatory solution which would not offend any of the sharp points of her sensitive self-love !

The veil is not a husband ! and an old maid and a nun are very near each other, when one strips the petals from the daisies. Less exacting than men, the convent does not look at the quality of the pretty faces which it inters, and I had certainly disturbed the heart of my aunt, during these twenty-four hours, more than I had ever before succeeded in doing since my birth.

But during the interval my too fragile vocation had perished, as we know, and necessity had decreed that Mlle. d'Épine should keep me at her side. This enforced association seemed to weigh upon her so heavily that I could not prevent myself from imagining that by some diabolical reflection of the past there were brought back to her memory, by the contrast between us two, the coxcombs of former times, those great lovers of witticisms, and that she pictured to herself what sport they would have found for themselves in the comparison, and the way they would have talked about fresh buds blooming upon thorny branches: for this was their way of expressing it formerly.

If these are not the exact words she used about herself while talking with me, — for few people would scourge themselves quite so freely, — still I have scrupulously given the sense of them, and I am certain that, together with my own recollections and those of Benoîte, and with the help of what my aunt has told me, I have pictured her character in the past, the present, and even, alas ! in the future ! . . .

Since then, life has taken up its course again, or rather its habitual stagnation, and my aunt has given herself the duty of throwing regularly upon my head words which sound like little shovelfuls of earth, with which she hopes to succeed in proving to me that Colette is dead, and can claim nothing in this world but the grace of a "*De profundis*."

I allow her to go on ! . . . But "*Vive Dieu !*" as said the most charming of our kings, "*let her take care, for I am not yet dead, and I intend to prove it to her some day.*"

IV.

MARCH 4.

MY good Jean Nicolas, it snows faster than ever, and my thermometer is still falling ! Does it speak the truth, or is it because in taking it from the window this morning after breakfast it brushed my aunt's shoulder ? I do not know, but I am thinking of burning my chairs to increase the fire in my fireplace !

To add still more to my misfortunes, the recollections of the past months which I have evoked for the last three days, must have escaped from my room like a flock of bats or of crows of ill-omen, for my aunt's increased bad temper can be explained in no other way, and never have her prophecies of the future taken a more amiable turn.

Isolated and poverty stricken, for it appears that I am poor, — walls of stone and walls of forgetfulness, — thus she sums up all that separates me from the rest of humanity with a joy which she does not succeed in concealing; and when she uncovers, in her paroxysms of gayety, her long lozenge-shaped teeth, black and repulsive from decay, the picture of an ogress rises before me, and a shiver which I cannot control passes between my shoulders.

All is not dark, however, in her anticipations, for she uses pleasant words when she traces for me the picture of our two lives indefinitely prolonged, and always ending together, and in these cases, in order not to cry, I have to look at the window and assure myself that they have not yet put up the bars which prevent little birds from flying away when they have no longer courage or fortitude, and when, if left at liberty, they would die of hunger in the woods.

She has drunk at the bitter stream of deception; and whether I will or not, she intends that I shall drink of it in my turn! And if fate does not itself take charge of the execution, she waits to mix for me with her own hands the quassia cup in which every drink becomes bitter.

Undoubtedly the planets which have traced my horoscope seem to her too indulgent, for she promises herself *in petto* to efface from it all the golden lines, in order to reduce my destiny exactly to a level with her own.

Mon Dieu! the good people of the Revolution did not ask more, after all. What they wished was simply that their misery might become the common misery; and, that they might be more certain that no one would dine on the days when they were hungry, they took away the roast. . . . But to think from this that a Mlle. d'Épine has ever put on a Phrygian cap would be a great mistake.

Meanwhile, I refurnished my room. A happy

chance revealed to me, what for a long time I had suspected, that my softest arm-chairs and my ward-robres which were the least dilapidated, adorned my aunt's room.

However tightly closed the sanctuary might be, the door was once left partly open, and one of those gusts of wind which toss the branches of our trees like straw under the thrasher, opened it at the time I was passing.

It was a little palace !

My aunt must have consecrated the two years of my absence to feathering her nest, it appeared so soft, only, like a thievish bird, she had done it with the wool belonging to others, and I no longer seek for the tapestries of the dining-room, nor for the rare cushions of the salon ; I know that she has given them a new destination !

Under these conditions, delicacy appeared to me to be out of place : so I began to carry to my room all that did not exceed the strength of my two arms aided by those of Benoite : four arms which were worth six ! And my walls were refurnished.

As a consequence of this, the intermediate rooms were empty ; and from the left to the right wing it was one vast desert, where one made one's way guided by the fires of our encampments at the two extremities.

The dining-room remained the only common land, as I had respected the silver plate and all the chairs !

Moreover, chairs were not lacking to me ; I had a great number of them, if not a great variety. My three sofas, for example, are all alike, of sculptured oak, carved as if by the nibblings of the mice, so many details are brought out in relief upon them, and they are covered with green tapestry, upon which beautiful ladies, and cavaliers in armor, utter their insipidities in a garden with walks very steep. The pointed bonnets of the châtelaines often reach to the tops of the trees, and all the figures are seen in profile, as the faces doubtless required a work too difficult for the embroiderer ; but the whole effect is none the less gay.

I have arranged them each against a panel of the wall, and my room is of such great length that in approaching one, I have forgotten how the other looked. From the first I can see the sun rise, from the second I am opposite to it as it sets, and from the third I could see the moon if the moon could be seen yet, but to-day from all three I have only seen the falling snow, and I have wished that I had a fourth that I might go and cry upon it.

My tables cannot be counted, because my aunt likes them the least, so my choice was unlimited. Some are round, some square, in all shapes and colors, and "Un," who partakes a little, I am afraid, of my wandering fancies, seeks his corner under each of them successively. Between the legs of the smallest ones his solid form gets stuck, and when he

feels himself caught, he drags them about with great angry leaps, making the little drawers fly and barking like mad. But he soon returns to me, and I find again the carpet of which my feet have never had more need; unless he did, would my dog merit the name which I have given him since my return, and which signifies so many things in a single syllable?

Formerly, while he was a puppy, I called him "Pataud": a name without pretension, which I chose for him on account of his slightly awkward grace and his immense head: but I understand people better now, and when I found myself here once more, and when at the end of a few days I took account of the friends who remained to me, and who still thought of me, and who proved to me that they did so—in all and for all, there was one, one alone, and it was he! . . . Hence his name.

To return to my furniture, I have completed it with six praying-stools found in a bunch: they have twisted legs of black oak, and cushions of crimson velvet with tassels of gold where the knees have left their mark. I lose myself in reflections before those two little round hollows, seeking the history and the thoughts of those who made them, but I only smell a frightful odor of dust, from whence some moths come forth and fly about with a terrified air, still sluggish with their endless feasting!

One of these praying-stools, devoted to its original purpose, is placed one side; and with the others,

ma foi, I must supply all that is lacking to me; — low chairs, easy chairs, lounging chairs, which can be distinguished only by the names which I have given to them; but they furnish me with the illusion that I might seat a dozen people at a time if they should come.

My poor Benoîte is at her wit's end trying to amuse me. When she sees me at the verge of melancholy, she makes use of her great resource; she says to me very low with an eye on the door in order to prevent surprises: "Would you like to make some pan-cakes, my Colette?" But I soon weary of sprinkling the fire with the dough and greasing my fingers with the butter, and I seat myself upon the hearth while she takes my place.

Sometimes also she attempts to put her knitting into my hands, an interminable stocking, the stitches of which I count without trouble. but I do not like to work any better than to cook, and the good woman has just commenced again her nursery tales in order to make me laugh. "Once upon a time there was a king and a queen —" But, merciful heavens! where are they, this king and this queen, and since they had no children, why have they not adopted me as a daughter? . . .



"I SOON WEARY OF SPRINKLING THE FIRE WITH THE
DOUGH."



V.

MARCH 5.

THIS morning a diversion has been brought about, and I still laugh at it all by myself. The store of salted provisions had given out, it seems, and my aunt, who is very fond of these things, had sent an order to the village for more. Accordingly, about nine o'clock, a cloth-covered wagon with the snow up to the hubs, and all its bells shaking, entered the courtyard: it was Bidouillet who had arrived with his provisions.

A new face, a new voice, a noise at the door; it seemed to me that some one had drawn away a curtain from before me, and I flew down the stairs like a whirlwind.

"Ah! M. Bidouillet, it is you! and do you bring some sausages?"

"Yes, if you please, Mademoiselle!"

And the good man turned towards me confused and stupefied, with his mouth and eyes wide open, with astonishment, his provisions in his arms, and his furred bonnet drawn down over his eyebrows, while his son, occupied with rubbing down the legs of the horse with a bunch of straw, stopped short, like a toy with a broken spring.

Evidently they both thought me extremely peculiar, the warmth of my reception surprised them, and I am certain that even to this hour they believe me to have a positive passion for pork, a taste which I have never known: but one does not wait three months for an interlocutor to be so quickly discouraged when one has been found, and while Bidouillet, who is not a great talker, followed Benoitte, I devoted myself to the boy, whom I brought in to warm himself.

“What are they doing in the village, how do they pass their time, and do they think down there that the snow will last for a long time to come?”

But the more questions I asked, the more obstinately silent the little fellow became, opening his mouth at last in an inextinguishable laugh, and amusing himself at my expense with so much good faith that his gayety ended by overcoming me also, and there we were laughing like two simpletons.

After that, confidence was established between us, and he began to reply to my questions, and now I know that down in the village the people prepare the seed and put their tools and ploughs in good condition during the day, and in the evening they visit one another without ceremony, and converse over some nuts which they crack, and over apples which they pare. When that is done, they draw chestnuts from the fire, they drink white wine, and then they go to bed very happily! It seems to me that I can

taste the flavor of the wine even up here, and I shall open my window this evening that I may listen to the laughter in the distance, like the poor wretch who eats his crust of bread with the odor in his nostrils of the roast which he covets.

“As for the snow, well, it may continue to fall, or it may stop, for it is certain that at this time of the year it will require only a single ray of sunlight to put an end to it.” I believe I might have found out as much as that myself, and I was imagining that there were among the country people some clever old men who would know yet more.

“And in the evenings when you are alone, what do you do, my good man?” I asked at length.

“They tell their beads.”

“And when they have finished?”

“When they have finished, ah! good gracious! Mamselle Colette, then I have been asleep for a long time!”

We burst into laughter, and from that we passed on to the animals.

“Did the Bidouilletts have many of them? Of what kind were they, and who cared for them?”

He described to me the herds of cattle and the flocks, like a skilful shepherd,—for he was the shepherd himself,—and when he added that the work would be doubled this summer, as the flock had increased so much:—

“Will you not need a shepherdess?” I asked him.

"In case you do, I know of one who would willingly engage herself to you and without making any difficulties about wages, too !"

Immediately he put on the cunning air of the countryman, who foresees a good thing, and, in an indifferent tone :—

"One might consider it," he said ; "does she live here. Mamselle Colette? "

"I should say she did," I replied, "for it is I, myself !"

That was our last word for the time being ! Astonishment had again seized him, and I had drawn from him nothing but a gesture, when his father cried from below :—

"Eh ! boy, are you there ?"

I left him to find out if he was there, and if he had wit enough left to say so !

"Think of me when you are in need of one," I called at the moment when the wagon rolled away from the door ; "I am quite in earnest, you know !" And I went running upstairs delighted with my morning.

Just at that moment I encountered Benoite in the corridor, and in spite of the piles of plates which she held, I threw my arms about her, exclaiming,—
"Rejoice, Benoite ! we will crack nuts this whole evening !"

"Nuts !" she exclaimed ; "what for ? Do you wish some to eat ?"

"Oh, no ! my poor nurse, it is a way of amusing

ourselves ! It appears that that occupation can make one laugh."

She went away, shaking her head, but she promised to bring down a sack from the garret, and to find two hammers for us that we may crack the nuts in the chimney-corner !

VI.

MARCH 6.

OUR two cows have been dry for a week. This circumstance did not seem funny to me, not even interesting; but it has procured for me the happiest day that I have passed for a long time.

On the first day after they went dry we had tea, on the second coffee, and Benoîte spoke of soup for the third morning; but Mlle. d'Épine, who is not the friend of privation, sent word to a milk-woman in the village, and since that time she has brought up to us the necessary ration on the back of her donkey every day.

This morning, as she came late, I was up when she arrived, and I was watching her measure her milk, when my aunt rang her bell violently. Seldom does the bell, which connects her room with the kitchen, make itself heard outside of the regular hours, so when the event happens, it is an extraordinary sign, and Benoîte, foreseeing the cause of the summons, took her flask of balm, divining that my aunt had awakened with a pain in her left shoulder, which would require repeated and vigorous rubbings. During this time, the good woman had emptied her jar, all our pitchers were filled, and she was preparing to depart.

"You have brought up too much, then?" I asked her, seeing in the second saddle-bag another full jar.

"Excuse me, Mamselle Colette, there is just enough."

"For us?"

"Not for you, for the other people, whose cows no longer give any milk."

"What! You are going still higher up?"

"To the Nid-du-Fol, yes, Mamselle."

She was warming her feet again while speaking to me, and shivering as she thought of the cold outside; she took up her measuring cup and was about to depart, when suddenly, irresistibly, the idea came to me of seating myself upon her beast in her place, and of going to deliver the milk in her name, and of thus having a delightful journey among the great snow-flakes which were falling. The thought alone made me tremble with delight; all the impatience of the past days of seclusion boiled in my veins, and I imagined with glee the donkey trotting in the soft snow, the wind beating upon me, and the astonishment of the people above when they saw the change of faces.

As for the good woman, when I told her my plan in two words, she talked, exclaimed, protested, and called to Benoit in vain; I paid no attention to her, but equipped myself in haste. Our walls, moreover, are not the kind which allows the voice to be heard easily; I was sure that my nurse would not hear

me, and I knew that I could make her say 'yes' eight times where in mind and will she would have said 'no.'

At the same time I tempted my new patroness by seating her near the fire; I showed her that she had a red nose, hands numb with cold, and blue lips, and that an hour of rest and warmth would be just what she needed to restore her. I assured her of my care for her property, of my thoughtfulness for her donkey, of my perfect knowledge of the way and of the houses of her customers, and before she could say another word, I had her shawl over my shoulders, her hood drawn down to my eyes, and in my hand her rustic switch which I made use of very dexterously, I assure you!

During the first quarter of an hour it was enchanting; the donkey's gait was gentle, the snow which swept my cheeks, soft and light as down, and I sang in a loud voice like a professional muleteer. But little by little the footpath grew steep, the stones hidden under the snow began to make us stumble, and in turning a bend in the road, the wind took me in hand, and a couple of gusts sent my hood to the right, my shawl to the left, and forced me to leap to the earth and wrap myself up again as best I could, while that villanous donkey continued his journey, and I pursued him, uttering all the known exclamations:—

"Whoa! . . . Whoa! . . . Whoa there! Whoa—oa there! . . . Whoa there, I say!"

Even when I had overtaken him, it was another

thing to hoist myself up; the saddle turned, supports were lacking, I put my foot upon ten small hummocks before finding one which was not all snow, and in which I was not buried almost up to my knees; and finally seated upon this shaking *château*, I uttered a cry of triumph only to find that the donkey was seized with a contrary fancy, his four feet remained glued to the earth, and I tried in vain with my hands, my voice, and my switch to make him go; he was like a rock except when he leaped like a sheep, and made the milk rise and splash out upon the mixture of snow and earth, and up to my very ears. The character of my exclamations changed.

“Go on! whoop! Gee! Gee there! P-r-r-r!”
At last our two wills fell into accord and he went on again.

At the *Nid-du-Fol* the snow is blinding and the wind a tornado, and when I come to the first house, my nose and my lips are like a milk-woman's. The people cry out, they warm me up again, and as they say that the wind is freshening and that there will be a tempest before long, I start back almost immediately. But this time we are facing the wind, and neither my donkey nor myself like that. The slope is hard to descend, the snow is freezing, the path grows worse and worse; we go slipping and sliding a good half way down the hill, where the final catastrophe takes place. At this point our troubles increase; with a marvellous sagacity, my donkey recognizes that safety, impossible

for both of us, is yet possible for him ; he lets his four feet slip all together, rolls over, and deposits me in an immense drift where the heaped-up snow receives me as upon a mattress, but where I remain more entangled than in a nest of feathers, while he goes off at a gallop which makes the ground tremble.

It was certainly droll, and my first impulse was one of gayety, so much the more as I imagined that I could easily get upon my feet again, whenever I wished. But the shock had stunned me probably, for, in spite of all my efforts, it was a thing impossible for me to do, and I felt so clumsy that I compared myself, I remember, to a beetle turned over on its back and wildly waving its feet in the air.

I no longer felt any strength in my limbs, and little by little, it seemed to me that my heart was turning into water like the snow which melted under my fingers, and that something was taking away by degrees all the sense that I had ; my head was beginning to feel so empty. . . .

Apart from that, however, the situation was not disagreeable ; the depth of my hole sheltered me from the gusts of wind, and my bed, in spite of its freshness, was soft — so soft, indeed, that I sank yet farther into it, and, like little powders, other flakes covered me up as the white shroud enfolds the dead.

As time passed, I felt the cold less ; I liked this sleep which was stealing so softly over me, and in spite of the very clear sensation which I still re-

tained, that no one could ever draw me forth from there, I had no fear, and I would willingly have smiled; but my lips refused to move, and I experienced what statues must feel, if statues think at all; that is to say, desires for motion in marble arms incapable of motion, speech striving for utterance in a lifeless throat, ideas seeking expression in a petrified brain.

Then . . . little by little . . . nothing more! and it seemed to me that I was no longer a woman of flesh and blood, but a mass of lead, the heaviness which I felt was becoming so intense.

I cannot tell how long this suspension of life lasted. . . . Had it been an hour or a day, it mattered little, for I think that I should have suffered neither more nor less if it had been more prolonged; and when I returned to consciousness, I was not far from being angry that they had interrupted my comfortable repose!

Upon one side of my bed some one was weeping; it was my poor Benoîte; upon the other I felt a moist muzzle which glided under the clothes, and it was thus that I awoke between my two dearest affections. Upon one of my sofas, regardless of the dignity of my beautiful dames, the milk-woman sobbed, and my first clear sensation was of remarking that her hands were as red as ever. How was it that she had not succeeded in warming them in all that time?

Moreover, I was still in doubt; was my bed of snow, or of wool? But, in stretching out my hands, I encountered at the right and at the left, bottles of warm water laid against me, then still others, and the rosary of bottles continued down to my feet. It is a cremation! It is useless to interpret it as the effect of a reaction felt after a severe cold, for I should not find that in my drift; I am quite convinced that I am at home! Moreover, the only familiar figure that is lacking to the picture comes out of the shadow, and I hear my aunt's voice: "She is a fool, an absolute fool, and I repeat to you that I can do nothing for her! But, really, she might have remembered that we are not prepared to have frozen people in the house!"

So I am frozen? This idea impresses me; and while the door shuts under the amiable hand that I know so well, all the tales that I have heard come back to my mind, and I have a vision of toes taken off with the boots, and of hands falling off with the gloves, which makes me tremble! Where have they left mine, *bon Dieu!* It seems to me that I am like spun glass, and seized with fear while thinking of my fragility, I no longer dare to move, until a cry of joy my poor old nurse utters on hearing me breathe, makes me laugh in spite of myself.

My lips have not fallen off; I venture my arms outside the coverlets to extend them to her, and I discover with pleasure that I have all my fingers yet. It

is a happy moment ! Then comes my story, like the rescues at Mont Saint Bernard, in which the obliging Newfoundland plays his rôle in the person of "Un," and from which I learn that, after my dog, I owe my safety to the resolute gallop of the donkey on his return.

A little less strength in his gait, a lighter blow of the hoof, and the imprints which were already three-quarters filled when they set out upon the search, would have been entirely obliterated, and I should have remained in my hole until the next spring!

After the tears and the pity, the scolding came : be it well understood that Benoite declares that she will never forgive me.

Her tone is so serious this time, that I believe that it will be necessary to wait until the evening kiss, before peace can be made and I see her dissolved in tenderness.

In the meantime she stuffs me with hot ptisans, which she brings to me without looking at me, and which she extends while turning aside her head, and in the interval "Un" serves me all alone. He it is that brings me my note-book, my pen, and even my bottle of ink, and all that without soiling the ends of his teeth : and it is partly to him and partly to my patient mute, Jean Nicolas, that I have related this affair.

VII.

MARCH 7.

HAD it not been for the jealous watch which Benoite kept over me, I should have gone back to my drift; for, upon my word, anything is preferable to the life which I lead here!

Nothing remains of my accident, not even a sneeze, and all that I have gained is no longer to have the right to pass the threshold of my door without my dog pulling me back by my dress and barking until Benoite comes running up and authoritatively orders me back again.

Just now, I took up the book of the Princesses of former times, but I discovered that I knew it by heart, for without turning the first page, I continued the sentence I was reading, and I think it will require several weeks for me to forget it sufficiently. . . . The calendar which I made for myself, that I might be able to cross off a date every evening, becomes too slow; I have written another for every hour in the day, and although the act is a dozen times more frequent, I still catch myself pushing forward the hands of the clock to hasten the joy of putting the stroke of the pen through the hour that I inter!

Things cannot long remain like this! . . . The roads will not always be impassable, and then, indeed, I will

find a way of filling my time, even if I am obliged to go about the country with a peddler's pack upon my back!

I have dreamed of it; I have even thought of what I would carry. But all is gone to ruin here! With difficulty have I been able to collect ten old silk dresses in the wardrobes, and in a chest some ends of old lace. What would our mountaineer women do with those?

One trade of which I have often thought, is that of the maids in the village inn! To see people all of the time, always to be moving about, always to be talking! A jug in the hand, and a smile upon the lips from morning until evening! that is a life worth the living! But would they engage me down there? . . . That is what I do not know!

While waiting, melancholy enervates me. I begin to make concessions, compromises: I surprise myself by sacrificing something in the appearance of my ideal,—of this image so clearly defined in my mind up to this time,—and I now commence to dream of a blond head, with great blue eyes, a childlike air, and a short mustache, even a somewhat inferior stature, very inferior indeed will suffice, if only he can find the means of taking me away from this place!

The isolation is making me weak, and I begin to understand those people who are made to deny their most firmly established convictions by the torture. . . . My torture at first appears light! But in the long run! . . . In the long run I truly believe that it would make me go through a finger ring, if I could escape from it in that way!

VIII.

MARCH 8.

MY friend, the milk-woman, has just been up to my room to inquire after my health, and to assure herself with her own eyes that I have come out of my accident without harm.

She can hardly believe her eyes, and has confessed to me frankly that for an entire hour she considered me dead.

However, this is the way things generally go ; here am I without a scratch, and that agreeable donkey, who certainly thought he was doing the best thing for himself, is obliged to stay in his stable with a terrible cold, bunches of straw about him, and warm drinks served to him in his stall.

The good woman did not trouble herself about him, however. He is subject, it appears, to these little misfortunes, and with his hoofs in slippers, he will soon be well again.

All is then going well ; I made my visitor sit down, delighted that I had such a windfall, and bent upon making her talk a long time.

Naturally, after a moment, my own prank came again to the front, and as I was laughing at her exclamations of fright and pity : —

"It is certain," said she, "that for a young girl, the life here is not very gay, and one can understand that you would seek a change sometimes." . . .

She reflected a little, then very naïvely asked me if I did not think the best way would be to marry and go away, and if my aunt was not busying herself with bringing this about?

I replied 'no,' without laughing this time, and just as she was going out of the door, I heard her murmur between her teeth: "The Mother Lancien might perhaps give good advice." - I did not think then of questioning her, but I can hardly wait for to-morrow to come when I can ask her who this Mother Lancien is, with her golden advice, which can perhaps take me out of my troubles, if one may believe my milk-woman. . . .

IX.

MARCH 9.

IT is as if one had just taken away one of the tiles from my roof, and that through this opening I could see the sky for the first time ; and that I could thrust out my arms to the elbow ; the revelation of my friend has put so much hope into my heart !

To-morrow I will have the opinion of this Mother Lancien, or I will lose my name, and if the oracle of this sibyl does not save me, it is because my case is desperate, and it will only remain for me to give myself up to the current, with my hands crossed over my eyes, and to say : Amen !

How does it happen that the reputation of such a woman has not come to me before ? I can only explain it to myself by seeing how little the owls in our ruins know of the affairs of the neighboring dove-cote.

This veneration which surrounds her ought to have climbed even our little hill, so greatly is she celebrated ; and one should hear my milk-woman talk about her ! When she spoke of her to me just now, one would have said that it was a priest drawing the veil from the altar before an attentive crowd : and while listening to her, I surprised myself by rising to make a reverential bow every time her name was

mentioned, just as we used to bow during vespers in the *Gloria Patri*, when all our heads bent at the same time, like the grain under a breeze.

And moreover, I never had the least desire to laugh! I shall always adore the magic wand extended towards me whether it is made from hazel-wood, or cedar, and I already venerate the round cap of my adviser.

Death, marriage, birth, — this woman takes part in them all in the village! She it is who blesses the betrothals, and who puts the destiny of the little one into each cradle, and if I had been born at Erlange, I would go and complain to her of the lot which I have received!

With all this being half a doctor, and having the rude concurrence of the village doctor, she glues her patients together, and cures and comforts them with the skill of a fairy. Stiffened feet, deep cuts in the flesh, malignant fevers, — she cures all; and as her plasters smell strongly of tallow, and her potions are perfumed with mint and thyme, and her prescriptions are given in a frank patois, all of which things they are quite accustomed to, they have confidence in her and take her medicines. Besides, she is not exclusive, she receives all kinds of patients in a friendly way, and more than one comes from the poultry-yard or the stable.

She knows the kind of dough to use to make a hen lay at once, the fodder which fattens, and that

which is injurious, and no doubt if we had turned to her at the right time, our cows would never have known the humiliation of becoming dry.

Finally, the thing which completes her list of perfections, and which concerns me most directly, is that her skill does not stop at material things, and that there is no difficulty, however intricate it may appear, which she is not able to straighten out. Like the good "Percinet" in the fairy tale, who sorted out ten tons of humming-birds' feathers with three blows of his wand, she finds a remedy for troubles at once, and the most refractory and those who only go to her as a last resource and because they are worn out with the struggle, return in delight.

Thus the procession never stops. Cattle that are led by the halter, sick people whom they lead by the arm, or those seeking advice who come to her in the dusk of evening, each has to take his place in the line at her door.

In addition to all this, she is a very holy woman, with a very clean white magic; one who does not put the smallest imp in the bottom of her kettle, and who has leisure to go and burn a few candles for the troubles of her clients.

I will see her to-morrow, the thing is settled, and Benoîte lying across my threshold could not prevent me from going to find her. Moreover, my poor old nurse will know nothing about it until it is too late, I hope, for I form my plans in the dark, and prepare my

cape and pilgrim's staff without crying, "Take care."—up to this time I hold even "Un" himself at a distance. I am suspicious of his great zeal, and there is a time when even a dog can speak too much, in spite of his enforced reserve.

Behind the door, where I have tied him, he whines to arouse my pity, and he scratches the wainscoting so vigorously that I think he hopes, by means of his claws, to make a hole to which he can put his eye. But I watch him, and the better to keep my secret, I will not speak even to myself until to-morrow.

X.

MARCH 10.

CERTAINLY the snow has some secret influence over me, and for a little while this morning I was again under its spell. But I have something better to do this time than to be lulled to sleep by the singing of the wind ! The man who carries a treasure and he who has empty hands do not walk in the same way ! . . . So I struggled, and here I am !

My departure was easy. As Benoîte was plunged in the joys of a great house-cleaning, and "Un" was shut up in a wardrobe, access to the fields was no longer difficult.

My dress raised high, my mountain shoes upon my feet, a cloak of my grandmother's around my shoulders, I was equipped to walk to Siberia, and never would the journey have been more quickly made.

I had not gone five hundred steps, however, when a black ball came down the road, and my poor dog rejoined me.

Had he overturned the wardrobe, broken open the door, or eaten the lock, to set himself free ? I do not know yet ; but as soon as I was certain that he had not noised abroad my departure and that no one was following him, I confessed that I was de-



"RAPPING ON THE DOOR WITH THE ENDS OF MY FINGERS."



lighted to have him to lean upon on the long road, and to be able to discuss with him all that I was going to say and do.

The house of Mother Lancien stands a little apart from the village, and is hidden in a group of pine trees whose high branches spread themselves over the roof like another covering. The snow has beaten into the path which leads up to it, and I think that in summer little grass grows there. For some reason, I was at the head of the procession, and my being alone seemed to promise me a long conference. . . .

While rapping on the door with the ends of my fingers, I ventured to put an eye to the square pane of the nearest window. The prophetess was there, seated beside the hearth. On the fire five or six logs were smoking, and above them was a great kettle, the cover of which the good woman carefully raises as she smells the contents. . . . Heavens! it smells like fresh meat, it seems to me! . . . I feel a slight shiver between my shoulders, and without knocking again, I draw back a little, — but, bah! do not sorceresses know everything! Through the walls she divines my presence, she rises, opens her door, looks at me a moment, skulking against the wall and as ashamed as a little chimney-sweep crying with hunger, and as little astonished as if I came to her for the twentieth time: —

“Mamselle Colette! Come in and warm yourself a little, for the wind is biting this morning!”

Then she installs me in an arm-chair of straw, and seats herself opposite me, while "Un" lies down at my feet contentedly stretching out his paws upon the warm stones. At first, I must confess that I quite lost countenance. I had thrown my cloak upon the back of the chair, and the snow-flakes, which melted in the warmth, fell one by one in cold drops down my neck, without my having the least idea of drawing back.

Meanwhile, she brightened up the fire, and scattered the cinders, all without saying anything: then, at the moment when not being able to keep silent any longer, I was going to utter some nonsense:—

"Do you like them very warm?" she asked me, quietly uncovering her great kettle again, and taking out some potatoes beautifully cooked.

Through the cracks in the skin, the mealy flesh, almost like silver in its whiteness, came forth in tiny flakes, and the steam which went up from them filled the whole room with its perfume.

At the same time my tongue was loosened, and in broken phrases, interrupting myself to breathe upon my fingers, or to change my potato into the other hand, I related my troubles and asked her advice.

Mother Lancien heard me to the end without a sign, her arms crossed above her head, and with a smile which became more and more kind; then when I had finished:—

"My good child," said she, gently, "your case is

not serious, and moreover, I do not know any that is incurable at twenty years of age : but I am afraid that the good people here have greatly deceived you as to what I am able to do, and that you believe me to possess a power which I have not. My remedies are very simple and you would find as many and perhaps better ones than I have, if you sought for them.

“During such cold weather as this, for example, I keep those who have coughs in their rooms, and those who have fevers in their beds, — all of whom would have nothing to gain outside in such weather : but I send out into the air the healthy, those who like to sleep in the chimney-corner and in the smoke of their pipes. As both feel much better, and as no one has thought of doing this before, they call it a miracle done by Mother Lancien, and it is all like this. . . . Between us two, we can say, can we not, that the trick is innocent?

“Now you are disappointed, and you think to yourself that if you had known all this, you would not have come such a long way to see an old woman who knows so little ! Perhaps, nevertheless, we can find what you need.

“If the time of the fairies and witches is past, there yet remain to us good spirits, always ready to take away our troubles, and to them I direct you. . . . May God guard me from speaking lightly of them or comparing them to others that have been imagined in former times ! But in this

affair where no one on earth can help you, what about the saints in Paradise, my young lady?"

"The saints in Paradise!" I confess that I was abashed, and if Mother Lancien had drawn from her bread trough a young and beautiful cavalier with a curled mustache and a plumed hat in his hand, in order to present him to me, it would have scarcely astonished me more. However, as she was waiting for a reply: —

"Nothing at all!" I said.

"There it is," said she; "just as I thought!"

And then she explained to me very clearly how one can obtain all that one desires by praying well; how one ought to set about it; of whom one should ask this favor, and of whom that, so that it seemed as if she must have lived very familiarly with these great saints of whom she spoke, and that she could answer for the sentiments of them all.

"When you were a child," said she, "whom did you ask to give you the fruits placed too high for your little hands upon the branches of the trees? Those taller than you, did you not? By process of growth you have now reached the stature of every one else as respects earthly things, but for those that are still beyond you, do as formerly, seek some one taller than yourself, for there will always be things that you cannot reach!"

She spoke so simply, but yet so grandly — if this word can be employed here — that without speaking

ill of our Curé, never had one of his sermons been worth as much to me. and her faith was so true and so communicative, that my heart beat fast while listening to her, and it seemed to me that in the clouds through the little window-panes, I saw all the inhabitants of Paradise with half-opened hands smiling at me in the distance, and ready to let fall upon me, at my prayer, all the good fortune at their disposal.

Why had I never thought of this resource ? I could not understand it ! And when I see the place that my nine days' devotions now hold in my life and heart, I am tempted to weep over the lost time !

But now there was no longer any trouble ! Nine days are so soon passed, and they appear so short, when one knows that happiness awaits one at the end !

"You must address yourself to St. Joseph," said Mother Lancien to me, "and I cannot remember that he has ever refused what I have asked of him. Only your prayers must be fervent, your nine days fully accomplished, and your faith absolute !" . . .

Absolute ! 'Tis that already, even as if the saint himself had given me his word, and I would not for an empire prolong my nine days a half hour beyond the time prescribed ! Moses paid too dearly for the thoughtlessness of his second blow with the rod upon the rock of Horeb. I will confine myself to one ! Only I will so strike upon my saint's conscience and

find words so convincing that perhaps I shall not have to wait even for the nine days to be completed before the spring issues from the cleft.

Oh ! this Mother Lancien, I adore her ! And if she wishes it, in the chariot that bears me away, I will make a place for her !

XI.

MARCH 11.

THE altar which I have erected to my saint is superb, and one entire corner of my room is transformed.

The greatest difficulty has been to find a statue of him, and in despair I was going to take a St. John Baptist, entreating him to permit me to invoke him under the name of St. Joseph, when I discovered in the chapel, in a distant recess, what I desired.

The statue is small, but made entirely of silver, and the little branch of lilies, which he holds in his hand, has the grace of natural flowers.

Putting many supports under him, has raised him above the candelabra, and, as he is now very high, he appears smaller in the distance, and already half lost in the sky.

Before him I have placed some holly with red berries upon it, which grows in the snow in the park, and all my praying-stools which I have not wished to employ for profane uses.

MARCH 12.

How will he come to my relief? Under what form will he send my liberator to me? I do not dare to think of that, and I dream of the manner in which a

saint might come from the sky to arrange the affairs of a poor Colette lost in her mountain.

In what mysterious way is he going to persuade a stranger to venture up here? And how will this gentleman finally present himself? Will he ring the great bell at the door, and, in order to announce himself, will it be necessary for him to say to Benoite: "Mademoiselle, here I am; I am the one whom St. Joseph has sent"? . . .

I think and I think, until I almost lose my mind!

Then I become afraid lest my questionings and my anxieties have not all the qualities of a most sincere faith, and Mother Lancien has said: "Implicit faith!" Then I stop myself, I close my eyes and my ears, and I no longer think of anything.

MARCH 13.

My prayers are so often repeated, and so many times during the day I am kneeling before my statue, that I am afraid sometimes of wearying him with the monotony, and I set my wits at work to vary the formula.

I turn my sentences about; upon the same foundation I put other words; I select my expressions with the painstaking of a careful writer, and I wish that I knew several languages that I might be able to say my prayers in the morning in French, at noon in Italian, and in the evening in Spanish, just to make a little more variety.

As the time passes, my hope grows stronger, and it is now a certainty.

More than five days! . . .

MARCH 14.

In spite of myself, at times I am troubled. This event which is coming so quickly, and which is going to change the whole course of my life, impresses and agitates me.

Moreover, it seems to me that I ought already to prepare myself a little, and this morning I commenced to arrange my affairs and the knick-knacks that I liked.

While thus occupied, Benoite came in, and as she watched me folding up two summer dresses:—

“You are going away, my Colette?” she said to me, smiling. . . .

I did not reply, I did not think that I had the right to announce anything yet; but she does not know how truly she spoke! . . .

MARCH 15.

Certainly between my saint and myself there is a perfect understanding. To-day as with my finest linen handkerchief, I brushed away the dust which had fallen upon his feet since last night, it seemed to me that a smile passed into his eyes, and that his little branch of lilies moved slightly as an encouraging sign.

MARCH 16.

Is there something in my face or manner that betrays me? I do not know: but my aunt's eyes grow larger and appear anxious as they follow me.

I have looked in a mirror to see what I could discover, but I only find that my cheeks are redder and

my eyes blacker than ever. It seems to me that all the blood in my body has been settling there for several days, and that there, as elsewhere, the approach of an important event makes itself felt.

My poor "Un" too, no longer understands my manner of acting. Formerly, when I kneeled upon the floor, it was for the purpose of getting nearer to him, and he very quickly rolled himself up into a ball that he might serve me for a cushion or a plaything. Now it is absolute silence that I impose upon him, and my finger is invariably raised when he approaches me.

MARCH 17.

My emotion continually increases, and now I do not know what more to do in order to manifest my fervor better.

For the rest, every moment my confidence also increases, and indeed I am afraid that it may become presumptuous, I feel so calm and strong! Then I begin to count upon my fingers the three theological virtues, and when I come to faith, I stop.

It has removed mountains, they say, why should it not make in my walls the slight breach necessary to enable me to go forth?

All is propitious for me, moreover, and about me significant signs abound. . . .

Of all the months in the year, for example, this providential advice was given me just in the month of March, the month of St. Joseph, and these nine



"MY FINGER IS INVARIABLY RAISED WHEN HE AP-
PROACHES ME."



days' devotions which commenced by chance, without premeditation, almost without thinking, are going to finish symbolically on the very feast day of the saint ! . . .

Without losing my head, without undue exaltation, I can truly say, that there is in it all a marked purpose, a mute but prophetic warning, and a depth which I understand wonderfully well.

MARCH 18.

The wind blows madly, the snow falls ever faster and faster, and I am afraid to see my poor traveller risk himself in this white expanse which stretches out farther than one can see.

At times, it seems to me that this aspect is the picture of my life ; all smooth and always the same, and awaiting, like the fields, only one footprint ! . . . Then I forget analogies in order to think at the present moment only upon the practical side.

Will he see his road between the two slopes, and if, like me the other day, his foot unfortunately slips at the edge of some ditch, who will come to tell me of it ?

If I had time I would find some other saint, and I would pray him to illuminate my hero's journey with a ray of sunlight that his coming might be less rough.

But this would be lack of faith, and my own saint might be angry perhaps, and I will leave it all in his hands, decidedly ! . . .

XII.

MARCH 19.

THE day of my new life, the day of my destiny! . . . There is not a single fibre in my being that is not agitated, and it seems to me that my blood flows at twice its usual speed, and almosts bursts through my skin from my head to my feet.

Even my prayers themselves no longer keep me quiet. . . . Now I kneel near my window; in this way my voice goes up to my altar, but my eyes need never leave the court-yard.

Every noise disturbs me, the slightest movement makes me tremble. . . . A footstep! . . . "Is it he?" . . . A knock! . . . "Are they coming for me?" Everything is like this!

But I do not think that he will come before noon. It is an important point, that hour! It is the middle of the day, and however little the sun shows itself now, one knows that it is bringing nearer, moment by moment, the desired event.

All this is quite in keeping, for my morning is finished, and my noon is just going to strike, I believe!

Everything is ready. I have laid out my most becoming dress, and in my girdle and in my hair I have twined two green sprigs, the color of hope, which the cold itself could not kill either in the park

or in my heart ! Without disclosing anything, I have sounded Benoite upon the luncheon. Evidently we can receive a guest without shame, and now I wait.

* * * * *

As in the song of the watch, which we used to sing at the convent :

“ Les midis sont bien passés,”

and nothing has happened !

Behind my window I am still waiting.

The falling night saddens me. . . .

However, in this twilight I can see to a greater distance, and I look without wearying. . . . But how long luncheon seemed to me ! In spite of myself my eyes would not leave the window, and yet what was the use of so much haste since here I am again still alone ? Without doubt, the shades of evening seem better to my saint, and in order to bring me my happiness, he waits until he can conceal his hand in the darkness.

Until midnight he has the right to delay, and I prepare for my watch. Some sticks upon the fire, my easy-chair near the window, and before my altar a candle—the last that remains to me, a very small one ! But to ascend to the heavens even the smallest ray will suffice, I think, and as for my traveller, however feeble the flame may be, its light will always prick the night with its red point, and it will be little trouble for the conductor, who leads him to me, to make a star of it, if he wishes !

XIII.

MARCH 20.

I AM sad, I am cold, and the warmth of my bed has not restored me from the effects of my freezing watch.

It is late, midnight ! Never, until now, have I sat up so long, and in these hours, in this oppressive stillness, one feels one's self so small, so lost. . . .

Moreover, without, the moon, which has just risen, is making great silvery streaks upon the white snow, and the pine trees in the background look as if their branches were hung in crystals, . . . but the hours drag so ! As the time approached, my heart beat louder, and it seemed to me that there was something else placed beside me which was making all this throbbing. Then at the first of the twelve strokes all stopped. "Now, or never !" I thought, and I counted up to the end with eyes tightly closed, and hands pressed hard upon my eyelids in order not to look until it was ended. . . . But, after as before, the court-yard remained empty, the bell silent, the road without a shadow of life ! . . .

At the same moment, my candle flickered and went out with a little splutter. . . . It was the end of it, I believe ; but it was no matter, I could have said that the statue itself blew it out to show me that all was

finished! It was melancholy. But the heart is so formed that it does not easily despond, and I involuntarily censured my "never" of a moment earlier. If it was not really now, still there was a to-morrow, and one must not find fault with a saint like that, because he does not keep strictly to the hour and the minute, as if it was a question of a bargain of some kind.

Perhaps he intended that the nine days' devotions should be fully accomplished and he wished to put off the recompense until the following day. 'A credit of twenty-four hours one might easily allow!

Thereupon I slept, without joy, but soundly; and here I am again at my belfry.

And now, this day, how will it end?

XIV.

MARCH 23.

WHAT an ending ! . . . Oh ! *mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !* who would ever have foreseen such a thing, and who would have said that by an act of imprudence I should nearly cause the death of a man ! . . .

How it happened, I do not well remember ; but this endless waiting wearied me, I believe.

Those hours which kept passing without bringing me anything were long, and hope deferred made my heart sick.

The more fervently I had believed, the more bitter became the disillusion, and little by little a veritable anger and a foolish resentment took possession of me.

It was all a cheat !

Had I not prayed with all my heart ? Why, then, were the promises not at once realized ?

I made my demand in a loud voice, begging and supplicating my statue, then indignantly and reproachfully.

But neither my prayers nor my anger had any apparent effect. . . . I had excited myself by talking, and became as much irritated as if the silence of the metal had been voluntary. . . .

I wept with grief. I promised him all that my imagination or my heart could suggest to me; — why did he remain silent? . . .

People who are all alone in the world and to whom no one listens, who pray to those above and still no one listens, what can they do?

And between each word, I stopped, I waited, . . . I gave him time, indeed! . . . And still, always nothing!

Then suddenly, disgusted, and exasperated, and in such rage as I had never before found myself, and fully believing in my right of revenge, I caught up the statue and with all my strength I hurled it through the window which opened upon the country, crying to it: —

“You have deceived me! Leave me, then!”

With the crash of broken glass upon the floor, there came a cry from below.

It was a man, and his face was covered with blood. My St. Joseph had struck him upon the forehead above the left eye, and as the unfortunate man was falling backwards, stunned by the shock, his feet were caught in the stones of our wall, and in his fall his knee was broken.

It has now been three nights that Benoîte and I have watched with him, and it is near his bed that I write and cry.

XV.

MARCH 24.

THE doctor has come again, the dressing of the knee has been at last accomplished; but the head is not yet out of danger, it appears to have been very badly injured.

They have covered his forehead with ice:—a thing certainly not lacking here,—and as he went out just now, the doctor said, tapping me upon the shoulder:—

“If he is not cured, it will not be your fault, little nurse; have good courage!”

Good courage! when I look at these bandages, and when I listen to this delirium! . . . Still I am very happy to know that even that much depends upon me, and I pass all my time trying to find methods by means of which I may do better yet.

But what trouble with my aunt! What scenes, and what cries at the beginning! At the moment when Benoite and I came in, our united strength being required to bring this great body from the road into the kitchen, she entered by another door.

“What is that?” she exclaimed, throwing up her arms. . . .

“An injured man, aunt!”

And while I spoke we laid him for the time being upon a blanket spread before the hearth.

"An injured man ! What do you think that I can do with an injured man ? Where did you find him ?"

And as she went on multiplying her questions, Benoite said to her without pausing in her occupation : —

"Mademoiselle hit him upon the head in throwing something outside !"

"But who is he ? . . . What has he said ? . . . What does he want, this individual ?"

"Peace." I could not prevent myself from saying to her, "and something that will stop this blood !" . . .

"I do not want him here, you know that I do not want him ;" she replied, turning aside ; "I never receive men here !" . . .

"I do not offer him to you," I said more loudly ; "this is my affair !"

"And what will you do with him ?"

"I will nurse him, of course !"

"Where, then, and with whom ? All alone, night and day ?"

"With my nurse, and I will give him my room !"

"You are a fool !" said she, violently, turning her back upon me, "and I will prevent that !"

"In what way, by throwing him outside and letting him die in the night ?"

"Pooh !" pursing up her lips. "Those are fine

words, those are ! Do you think that one dies from such a little thing ? . . . In less than an hour, the man himself will ask to go away and will not understand what you mean by your complaints ! ”

“ You may be sure that I will not keep him by force ! ”

“ And if he remains like that, what do you intend to do ? ”

“ I have told you already,” I replied, now at the height of exasperation ; and raising my handkerchief, which I was holding against the wound, “ I intend first to close up this hole which you see, then when that is accomplished and this gentleman departs as you say, I intend to beg him with clasped hands to pardon me for having cut open his head. Do you understand, aunt ? ”

And without wishing to hear any more, and without adding anything to this odious discussion, some word of which I was afraid would come to the ears of the poor wounded man, I sent Benoîte to prepare all that was necessary, while I remained upon my knees beside him, moistening his forehead with fresh water and eagerly waiting for some sign of life.

But his lips remained dry and bloodless, and the tiny stream of blood which flowed gently without ceasing, collected upon the white linen in a spot that grew continually larger and larger.

Like a tiger in a cage, my aunt was walking in the background, murmuring incessantly the same things,

and little by little a horrible fright came over me that these eyes over which I was bending would never uncloze again, and that this was the forehead of a dead man upon which the mark of my hand would remain forever. . . .

Then suddenly I saw Benoite, who passed by me running, and who from the threshold of the door, called loudly to some one in order to stop him; and a second after, the doctor came in with her. Providence had made him return by this out-of-the-way road, and my nurse, who had seen him from the window, had been able to summon him just in time. . . . An hour later they had installed the unfortunate man in his bed, dressed his wound, and brought back, if not intelligence into his looks, at least an easy and natural breathing.

With an authority which a stranger or a doctor alone could exert with my aunt, the doctor, tormented by her behavior, had sent her away at the beginning, and on coming out he found her still in the corridor complaining to me, and repeating her refusal of help, exclaiming as soon as she saw him: —

“You know, doctor, I will not mix myself up in this; I will do nothing!”

“That is perfectly right, Madame,” he replied brusquely; “young hands are softer and gentler to dress wounds, and it is quieting for a sick man to have a pretty face to look at.”

Since then, three days have passed, and if the

fever has gone down a little, the mind is still wandering.

The name that he pronounces most often, is that of a certain Jacques, to whom he makes some unheard-of speeches with such droll words that in spite of myself sometimes I laugh and cry in a breath! Then, the only phrase that he uttered when he was falling into the road comes back. When Benoîte and I came running up, he was already upon the ground, but not yet unconscious, and as I came near him crying distractedly: "Oh! *mon Dieu*! Monsieur, what is the matter?" he raised himself upon one knee and with something like a smile, if one can believe that a man in that condition could smile:—

"Ah! ha!" he said, "it is the Brahmin!"

Then he fell back, and we brought him in. Since then his "Brahmin" comes back often, and I cannot conceive what he means to say by that.

Who is this man? We know nothing about him. The doctor has inquired at the inns in the village; nowhere has a traveller of this description been received, and one is forced to believe that he sprang from the ground on this villanous road.

His clothes are elegant; his overcoat is short and finely trimmed with a superb fur, his hands are white, and all that the bandage allows one to see of his face is distinguished.

In his pockets, nothing but a pocket-book without an address; and for a valise, a sort of travelling-bag

of leather which he carried upon his back, and the lock of which is tightly closed. The idea of opening it is repugnant to me and the doctor consents to wait a few days longer, hoping that he will be able to answer us himself.

Benoite also loses herself in conjectures.

"Perhaps he is a peddler," she has just said to me, while gazing at his peculiar style of baggage, "or perhaps a photographer! Some of them do not carry much more baggage than that!"

But I do not think that; with his hands, his eyebrows, his beard, I take him for a Duke, or a Count at least, for a gentleman in any case, and I put my wits to work to discover his age and name.

Is he handsome? I should not say so, and I do not think of it now. My remorse and my anxiety keep me from everything, even from food and sleep, and the doctor becomes red with anger at finding me still up this morning.

With authority, he compels me to go down-stairs and walk a little while in the court-yard.

But when out in the air, my head fails me, everything turns dark, and I come up again to his bedside, very determined not to leave him again until he returns to consciousness. . . .

Oh, for a sensible word to show me that his mind is not lost! Compared with that all else is as nothing.

XVI.

MARCH 25.

HE has spoken, it is over ! he is saved ! and I am so foolishly happy that I would like to cry aloud.

Yesterday evening, in spite of my drowsiness, I still wished to watch ; and to be more comfortable I had put on, as a lounging-robe, the least faded of the old silk dresses which I hunted out last month in the chests, for the sleeves of my ordinary gown prevented me from stretching out my arms, and the two skirts caught up everything.

In this great plain, soft skirt, and in this waist which seems made for me, I feel so comfortable that I cannot tell how it happens, but in a moment I am fast asleep in my chair, and so quickly has it come to pass, that I have not been able to struggle against it, and I remain thus, forgetting my sick man for more than two hours perhaps.

Then the lamp which was going out, and the dying fire, that feeling of gloom and sadness which comes upon one in the middle of these solitary watches, awoke me suddenly, and I ran to see what time it was. It still lacked some minutes before the time to give him his medicine, thank God ! and so I might be able to warm up the room again, for it had become freezing cold.

On my knees before the fireplace, I was laying with my two hands a great log upon what remained of the coals, blowing with my mouth in order to set the little tendrils of moss on fire, when suddenly I heard a voice speaking to me, and my surprise was so great that I arose with a cry of fright, without at first understanding anything.

Then immediately I thought of the wounded man, and ran to his bedside: it was indeed he who had called me. He was leaning upon his elbow, his only free eye widely open and looking at me with an intense curiosity, with as astonished an air as if he had suddenly found himself transported into another world; and before renewing his question, he remained such a long time thus, scanning me from my feet up to my eyes, that I was going to hazard a question myself, when, at the movement of my lips, he hastened to prevent me:—

“Madame,” . . . said he, hesitatingly, as if to see if I was going to protest, “where am I, I pray you?”

“At the château d’Erlange de Fond-de-Vieux, Monsieur!” I replied, trembling a little.

“Do not know it at all!” he murmured. . . . “And are you then the châteline?” he continued, raising his head.

“Partly, Monsieur, yes.”

“And, . . . pardon this frankness, Madame, but in truth, I believe that I have lost my mind . . . what can I be doing here, if you please?”

"Waiting to be cured, Monsieur! . . . Following your frightful accident, we brought you in here, and" . . .

"Ah! it was an accident?" said he.

And as I opened my mouth in order to exclaim: "I beg you, do not believe that it was anything else!" he went on, always with the same sang-froid: —

"Will you extend your kindness so far, Madame, as to tell me in what year we really are?"

If I had not seen the perfect calm on his face, assuredly I should have thought that he was again delirious, but he spoke with the perfect ease of a man who is making conversation, and mechanically I replied: —

"In 1885, Monsieur!"

"Is it possible!" said he, in a low voice, as if speaking to himself. "I would not have believed that that was the style!" . . . then, without change of manner: —

"Would it be possible for me to have a pen and some paper, that I may write to a friend who must be dying of anxiety?"

"Monsieur Jacques?" I inquired, in spite of myself.

"Precisely!" said he. "Why, has he been here, then, Madame?"

"Not at all, Monsieur, but in your delirium" . . .

"Ah! I have been delirious," said he. . . . "Hum! have I said anything unsuitable for youthful ears to listen to?"

And as I shook my head without thinking:—

“No? Ah! so much the better! It is then certain that madness has more good sense than reason! . . . And you will do me the favor to give them to me?”

“All that you wish, Monsieur, but to-morrow. It is night now, and you must not write in the night.”

“Why?” asked he, “if I had a lamp?” And he began to smile like a child at what he had said.

“Because the doctor wishes you to have complete rest and quiet, and he would never pardon me if I allowed you to have them,” I replied. . . .

He frowned like a person who is not accustomed to be refused, and he put out his arm so quickly that in spite of myself, I drew a step back. He smiled again then, and bending his head:—

“Do not be frightened!” he said, “and pardon me, Madame, I have kept you standing. In truth, a sick man is a poor cavalier.” — And with his finger, he pointed out to me a chair.

As for me, I was confounded! This man awaking from delirium, among strangers, suffering greatly, and yet who forced himself to talk tranquilly upon indifferent matters in a half-mocking tone, and without even asking what the accident was which had thrown him upon this bed, seemed to me to resemble nothing that I had ever imagined.

Without seating myself, I had leaned my arm upon the back of an easy-chair, and I remained without a word, without an idea, before this strange individual.

Then the half hour was struck by the clock and the remembrance of the medicine came back to me.

"You must drink this, Monsieur!" said I, taking the prepared glass from the table. But he drew back with an unequivocal gesture, and grieved, I repeated in a supplicating tone:—

"I beg you, Monsieur, it is to make you sleep!"

"I know that very well!" he said between his teeth; "it is in the play." He drank it without saying another word; then as Benoite, whom I had forced to go and throw herself upon the bed, re-entered softly:—

"And here is the old Françoise!" added he.

He laid his head back upon the pillow, murmuring: "Thanks!" and ten minutes later he slept, as he has slept until the arrival of the doctor, who is with him now.

* * * * *

The doctor is satisfied, up to a certain point at least, and he considers the fear of congestion as entirely removed.

He is as much surprised at the character of our singular patient as I am, and just now, when leaving him, he wiped his forehead:—

"What a lively fellow! my poor child," said he to me. "Why has he not remained in a lethargy a month longer! We shall no longer be able to do anything with him! He is actually talking about getting up and running about in the fields!"

It appears that this morning as soon as he saw the doctor enter, he half rose up on his pillow, regardless of his bandages, and commenced to thank him in terms brief but courteous for all the trouble he had given him:—

“This is not the kind of weather in which to make you travel over such roads,” said he, “and I beg you to excuse me, Monsieur.”

Then he commenced a series of questions very nearly the same as he had addressed to me the preceding night, which proves that my replies were not very clear to him, and this so rapidly that the doctor declared that he almost lost his breath in trying to follow them.

Once reassured as to his geographical situation, which evidently was not clearly defined in his mind, he inquired with a good deal of animation about what had happened to him:—

“I feel a great weight here!” said he, showing the doctor his knee. “What is it? You have not cut off my leg without informing me of it, I suppose? And here? Have you trepanned me? My head is all bound up.”

The doctor reassured him as best he could, but he is not one of those sick people that one can amuse with words. He reiterated his questions as to the *why*, and the *how* of each thing, and it was necessary to give him the most minute details of all the bones and all the injured parts. After that he demanded a

mirror, and the doctor handed him one from his surgical case.

"What beautiful work!" he murmured. "A fine thing indeed to cut up the best part of my face like that! But, bah! the great Pyrrhus received a tile upon his head, why should I not perish from a broken bottle?"

"It is no longer a question of perishing!" the doctor answered.

"I hope it is not, *pardieu!*" he replied. "I still feel a little weak this morning, but in a few days I will rid my hostess from the disagreeable charge of a sick stranger. Tell her so, doctor, I beg you!" And as the doctor bent his head with a gesture which clearly signified: "Go on, my friend! I do not wish to contradict you, but you are speaking nonsense!" the young man perceived that this paternal yes, must be only a lure or an anodyne for a feverish man, and that probably the doctor had an entirely different idea behind those great white eyebrows.

He began then to question the doctor and to demand so imperiously to know the hour and the minute of his cure, insisting that a series of fables ought not to be invented for a man of his age, that the doctor was obliged to fix upon a delay of a month, reserving to himself the right to add a second month if the case called for it.

You should have seen his fury then! . . .

"A month, doctor! A month! You wish to keep me here a month! But you do not seriously think of such a thing! . . . I have laid out for my spring a very different work than that of lying here and watching my bones grow together, I beg you to believe! The repairing can go on somewhere else as well as here, I suppose! A month! But in a month I shall sleep upon a mat of palm leaves, with six slaves to fan me, and with the sky of the Indies over my head."

"Then you will have found some wonderful sail-boat, my dear sir!" said the doctor, laughingly. "But apart from that, let us reason a little. You do not particularly desire to remain a cripple all your life. I think, for want of a few days of carefulness?"

"No, certainly! for I put my feet to a use of which few people dream; but in this box in which I am imprisoned, what does it matter whether I sleep in my bed or in the train, the immobility is always assured!"

"If you travel upon the clouds, perhaps, yes!"

"And even without that!" he replied quickly. "What do you think the sleeping-cars are for? However savage your mountain may be, I can easily find a dozen men who will carry me to the nearest station in their arms. And so on, from point to point, until I come to the sea. And then without a movement on my part, upon barges or upon inclined planks, as great boxes are rolled, I shall find myself on board.

where I can spend without reckoning it, all the time you consider necessary to the healing of my injuries."

"Is it a matter of life or death, Monsieur?" the doctor asked.

"It is a matter of my will and pleasure simply."

Thereupon the doctor, without adding a word, took his hat and rose from his chair where he had been, drying his great fur coat in front of the fire; but seeing him ready to go, the sick man became so greatly agitated, that fearing a return of the fever, the doctor approached the bed.

"And I should like to know who it is that will prevent me!" the stranger exclaimed, becoming more and more excited.

"*Mon Dieu!* Monsieur, I will be the one," the doctor replied, laying down his hat, and reseating himself tranquilly. "Let us talk frankly, and since you do not like fables, let us speak truths.

"First, permit me to say that I regard your knee and yourself as the most indifferent objects, and on any other occasion, since you do not care whether your injuries heal or not, I should leave you to fall to pieces without putting out my little finger to save you, and that with the best grace in the world, believe me! But, for the present, I am your doctor, and this fact entirely changes the situation.

"Have you ever been a soldier, Monsieur? It has seemed to me quite possible. But in any case, you are not without knowledge of what the word soldier

implies, and of the submission which it suggests. I therefore wish to speak of obedience to orders. They place a soldier at a post, with the command not to let a living soul pass. Why? How? In whose name? he knows nothing of it all; but in the strength of this command, he lowers his bayonet, come friend or come foe.

"Between you and me something like this exists. I see you in the road, I do not know you, you are nothing to me. And I would not bar your way with a pebble. A fall comes, a wound, a misfortune which renders you helpless, and by the blow which prostrates you, you belong to me. I answer for you as the soldier for the post which he guards.

"I may not love you, I may serve you with regret; I may even count you among my enemies; but sickness and death present themselves and it is my duty to arrest them; to watch over you, and, if I can, to defeat their plans. Without knowing you, without any one having sent you to me, since you are wounded, and I alone can cure you, I must answer for you. Attempt to pass this door, and I lower my pike, I warn you, Monsieur!"

"Doctor!" the young man replied, immediately extending his hand, "pardon me, and be certain that you see here a prisoner upon parole. I do not ask you to excuse me by saying that sickness has made me bad-tempered, for I am always as you saw me just now; but I confess to you that however headstrong

I may be, when one strikes me hard and in the right place, I yield ! ”

“Once I am assured of that, it suffices,” said the good doctor.—And he left his fiery patient with the desired materials for writing, which he had at last obtained.

Meanwhile we have examined the passport of our stranger, and we now know approximately who he is.

His name is Count Pierre de Civreuse, and “so far as one can form an opinion of one at first sight,” said the doctor to me, “his profession is to act foolishly. In other respects, a very nice gentleman, in my opinion, and evidently of an unusual character.”

The doctor has in like manner made known to him the names of my aunt and of myself; and now we are all presented to one another. But of the true cause of the accident, the doctor has said nothing as yet, owing to our boarder’s irritability, and it is to me an inexpressible relief. More and more now the stranger alarms me, and I do not see with what sort of a countenance I shall be able to come to an explanation with him.

Benoite, who has just put his room in order, tells me that he is writing constantly, and I leave him quiet with his friend Jacques, very anxious to know how all this will end, and how I shall ever be able to obtain my pardon from a character so little prepossessing.

* * * * *

PIERRE DE CIVREUSE TO JACQUES DE COLOGNES.

You believe me dead, do you not, my good friend ? and I will say that for some days I have believed myself so.

I do not know how many hours I have been buried, and I cannot say where. Without doubt where all people who are unconscious go. And that seemed to me to be so low under the earth, and weighed so heavily upon me that with all the strength left me, I seemed to be constantly trying with my shoulders to lift off the cover of my coffin. Certainly, in this state of unconsciousness one must already have made half of the final voyage, pausing just at the extreme limit between the two worlds where it needs but a grain of lead to tip the balance to either side.

Happily for me, I have swung to the right side, — humanly speaking, understand ; and I awoke one evening a little bruised by my fall (for one does not tumble from the heavens without noticing it), and I now lie with my knee confined in a box of white-wood and with my head done up in bandages. Midnight was striking from the clock, the propitious hour for returning from the tomb, and it was the first sound from the outside world that had come to me.

If I remember correctly what passes in the world, said I to myself, those little machines never give

more than twelve strokes; if this one does not exceed that, then I am upon the earth and living.

It happened thus; and now, sure of my identity, I opened an eye that I might reconnoitre the place.

My friend, do you know "*La Fée*," by Octave Feuillet, a lively little play quite popular just now? Or have you ever seen it presented? Well! this particular evening, which was yesterday, I believe, I awoke at the first act of the drama of "*La Fée*," and I gave the replies to Mlle. d'Athol in person during a scene or two. Do not think that I am joking, but listen to me.

The first thing that a sick man thinks of inspecting is his bed. Mine had twisted columns hung in green tapestry of the time of Louis XIII, or perhaps Louis XIV, — I cannot be certain of it, — and with a coverlet of old silk which we will call a curtain, if you please. The room in which I found myself was very large, and badly lighted by two wax candles placed in candlesticks so tall that they never seemed to end. The room was wainscoted in sculptured oak, and by force of instinct I imagined that I could see in the shadowy darkness that the beams of the ceiling were very high indeed, with a small golden band which glittered here and there.

Against the wall were some great stiff sofas which made my back ache to look at, and a collection of praying-stools, all alike, put in a line as if for matins, and not the shadow of a carpet on the floor.



"IN AN EASY CHAIR BEFORE THE FIRE-PLACE A
LITTLE SLENDER LADY."

Finally, in an easy-chair before the fireplace,—you suspect, indeed, that I keep this easy-chair for the last, do you not? — a little slender lady, who is sleeping in a very upright position; I observe that she has an exquisite figure and is of a blond complexion, and that she is dressed in a gown of rose-colored satin with a long train. Her gown was two hundred years old, her face eighteen: how could these two things agree? I labored such a long time over this problem that the little lady awoke suddenly, without giving any sign of her intention.

She glanced towards my bed like a child caught in a fault: in the half light I still had the appearance of one sleeping soundly, and quieted in respect to this, like a faithful vestal, she directed her attention to the fire. She knelt down, arranged the embers, breathed upon them with pursed up lips and scattered the cinders in her hair; then with her two hands she took up a log, the quarter of an oak of medium size, and laid it promptly upon the coals.

She moves, she lives, and then the idea of a châtelaine of former times petrified in her house by some strange enchantment leaves me, and I perceive that I am in the Breton château where *Jeanne d'Athol* prepares her pious witchcrafts and converts that sceptical *de Comminges* by the sole charm of her grandmother's gown and her old-fashioned talk. Only this time she has forgotten her cloud of powder, and the color of her hair does not heighten the illusion

As gently as I can, I call her: she turns around with a cry. Evidently my awakening was not in the program, and her trepidation is great. She approaches however, and we talk a moment, at cross purposes, she leading me away from my subject, and I showing her very plainly that I read her game. Finally she frees herself from me by giving me a narcotic as one does in such cases; but it does not send me to sleep quickly enough to prevent me from seeing the third personage enter, an old duenna, withered as a last year's apple, with little gimlet eyes which seem to pierce clear through you as she looks at you, and who will play finely the rôle of the old Françoise. Then the curtain falls, and I awake the next morning, still amidst the same surroundings, but face to face with a doctor, witty and rough, who explains my case to me in two words, and who puts me back into my place so quickly when I attempt to revolt, that I am still a little stunned by it.

If you wish to know all, my friend, I have a hole in my head and a broken knee. Had you an idea that heads and knees are such fragile things? I had not! and I handle myself now with an unwonted gentleness and respect.

Can one conceive that between the femur and the tibia it is possible to produce so violent a rupture! Some splinters here, a fracture there, and with the rest, a kneepan thrown off the hooks, like a broken compass that has lost the north and is no longer capable

of acting in a reasonable way! As for my bone box, it is the forehead which is injured, and they promise me a rapid and solid healing in a few days.

To sum it all up, I laugh, but I am furious; furious as I know how to be in my best moments; and the thought that you are to be detained at your uncle's house for some months, adds not a little to my wrath. Days or weeks of immobility without you to hold my head! Think of me with my little rose-colored lady for my only nurse, under six feet of snow! For I have forgotten to tell you that like the grain sown in the autumn, we are actually under the snow, where it only remains for us to sprout. And to come up here and care for me, my doctor has to put on alternately seven-league boots and Norwegian skees.

Now you are going to ask me the cause of all this, and also, what on earth did you go there for?

Let us see: You remember that I intended before going to the country of the Sun, to give myself the pleasure of a striking contrast by coming to freeze first among some of the characteristic aspects of winter, as gourmands prepare themselves for a good dinner by a morning of fasting and a long walk in the open air?

For this purpose I stopped at a little village — its name would tell you nothing, for you do not know it any more than I knew it yesterday; and from there, furnished only with a sort of soldier's knapsack, I went on foot into the mountains.

My route was pointed out to me, and I was told that by walking straight ahead I should soon come to the highest point, where there was a superb view, a forest of pine trees, the glimpse of a valley, and possibly even the sight of a château.

At the end of five hundred metres I was in absolute solitude ; and if you have never happened to wander about the country at this time of the year, you cannot imagine how infinitely more profound this solitude is than any other. You see no sign of a footstep except your own, you hear no sound of an animal in all the surrounding country, and there is even more diversity in the blue Luzerne, the pink sainfoin, and the yellow of straw, than here, where there is only a smooth and shining tone, which is admirable during the first half hour, but fatiguing during the second, and enervating and irritating after a time.

No more irregularities of surface, no more hollows, no more humps ; all is level ; a Republican equality ! From time to time a flock of crows makes you despond with their insolent screamings ; they are the only survivors. It is their hour, and they know it ! Upon the bushes there is snow and little frost tears ; they are the congealed moisture of three months ago and have yet some weeks to glisten before they evaporate. A devilish north-east wind cuts your face like a knife.

Still, it is a long road which has no turning, and I had had successively my glimpse of the valley, the beautiful view promised, and the forest, when the

château itself appeared. I spare you a description of it, having seen it very imperfectly myself, as you will soon understand, though now we shall be forced to see much of each other.

One of its wings faces the road. It was before this that I had stopped and I innocently occupied myself in removing the snow from a great stone, on which to sit that I might look at it more at my leisure, as I was quite captivated by the savage and melancholy appearance of the place.

A singular curiosity seized me. It seemed to me that behind these walls something original and unexpected must be concealed, and I was at once assailed by an overwhelming desire to penetrate their precincts.

You well know that whatever is closed and apparently inaccessible always tempts me, and I do not remember, even as a boy, to have stolen an apple from a low bough. . . . As to high ones I cannot say as much.

At the same time the memory of our last conversation came back to me. You recollect that evening when we were talking together about my journey, and you cautioned me to be prudent? "Once in the Indies," I said to you, "I intend to see everything, and above all that which the European eye must know nothing about. I mean to know something of the intimacy of the family life and of the secret ceremonies, to familiarize myself with the customs, laughable or contemptible, and even to pry into the mysteries of the religion itself, if I should have to use twenty

disguises in order to come to the feet of Brahma and adore without veils in accordance with the rites ; ” and you, you replied to me wisely : — “ Take care ! — every man is jealous of his secrets and the inviolability of his fireside, but the Orientals more so than any others, and for the pleasure of putting the sole of your foot where no one has put his before you, you will risk getting into a scrape.”

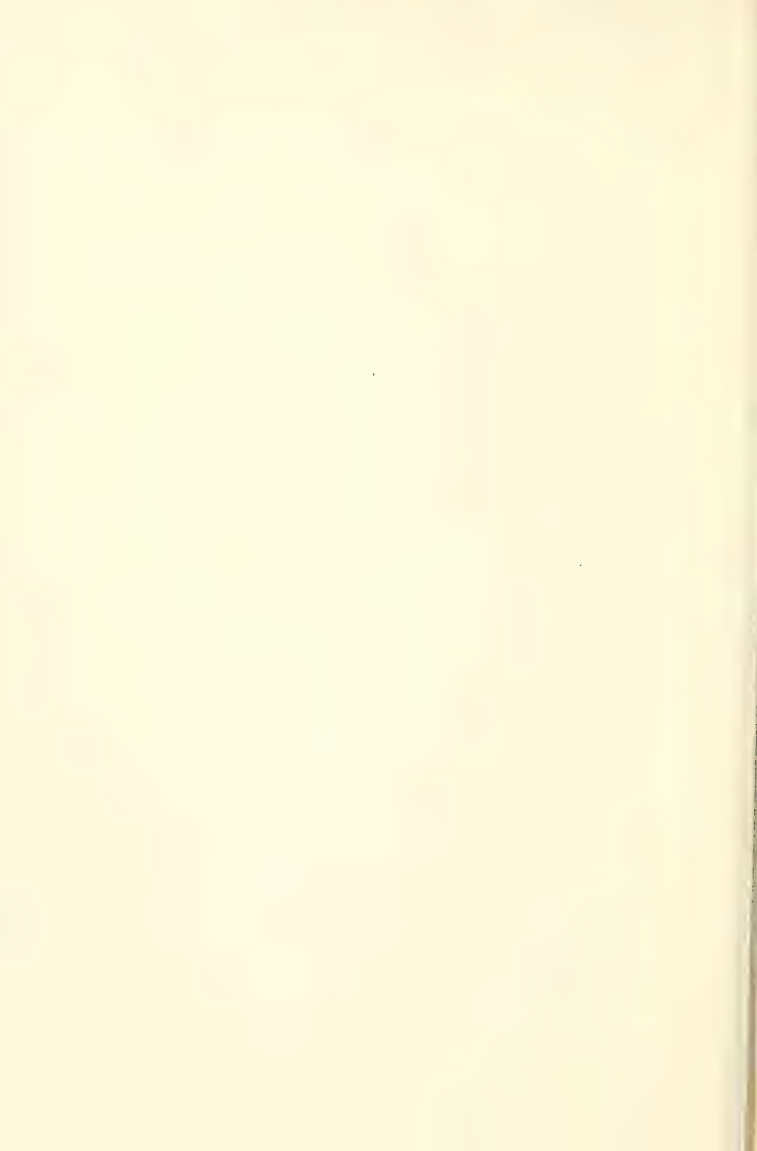
“ How ? ” I asked you, laughing. “ Do you think that the god will disturb himself for me, and that I shall have the good fortune to see him manœuvre his eighteen legs in order to come down from his pedestal ? ”

“ Perhaps not,” you said, “ but his faithful ones are without remorse, and it is very possible, if you venture into his sacred enclosure, that you will encounter some Brahmin who will give you a rap upon the nose to make you remember to respect the boundaries.”

Why should I have thought of this at that moment ? Was it because I was wondering if the susceptibility of the French would be as quickly aroused as that of the East Indians, or because I felt I was unconsciously measuring with my eye the height of the wall and seeking a projecting stone where I might place my foot ? I cannot tell ; but, just at this moment, a great noise of breaking glass made me raise my head, and before I could say, “ ouf ! ” a projectile, the nature of which I do not know, but which was hurled with a sure hand, struck me full on the forehead.



THE CHÂTEAU D'ERLANGE DE FOND-DE-VIEUX.



The blow was so severe that it made me stagger, and with both of my feet caught in the stones, I fell upon my knees with my whole weight, without being able to soften the fall, and so clumsily indeed that it has resulted in the injuries above mentioned.

Could one reply in a more peremptory fashion to a person's indiscretion, or could your lesson have a more prompt application than this crushing of my curiosity in the egg, and this encounter with your Brahmin in the third degree of longitude? . . .

Some one hastened up, evidently frightened, and talked in a confused way; but I could have sworn that an intense mist had suddenly risen from the ground, for already I could not distinguish anything, and I think I must have lost consciousness almost immediately.

Of what took place afterwards, I have no remembrance, for my sleep in the other world lasted, it appears, full four days.

As for the author of my wound and the instrument of my punishment, so much reserve is practised before me on that point, that I am left to my own conjectures; but when I see my little rose-colored lady again, or indeed the old woman with the piercing eyes, I will manage to find out.

In the meantime, I know at least the name of the manor: it is the château d'Erlange de Fond-de-Vieux, and there you may address your letters.

The postman comes up here from time to time,

especially when the packet for the neighboring villages appears large enough to him, or when he is charged by the grocer or the butcher with something important enough to merit the ascent.

Only two women live here: Mlle. d'Épine and Mlle. d'Erlange, aunt and niece; and when I ventured to insinuate to the doctor that I might be somewhat of an embarrassment to them in more ways than one, he denied it with so much warmth that it only remained for me to put my scruples aside, and accept the kindness of this little community.

Have I said, by the way, that this doctor speaks of a month of quiet, a term which, in the mouth of a doctor, signifies invariably twice that length of time, and that he requires me to lie in an absolutely horizontal position?

This idea fairly maddens me. And when I think that it is all on account of a platonic contemplation in front of a wall, a contemplation which did not last even ten minutes, and which would not have made an angel blush, that I am going to pass weeks of ennui in the company of three women when I ought to be hunting the tiger in the jungles, — when I think of this, I am almost ready to beat my brains out! . . .

“But since you are in the place that you were so eager to enter, of what do you complain?” you are going to reply to me. . . .

Ah, my dear friend! it is because that I am here, that I wish now to get out: I have seen all there is

within, and there is not enough to divert a man of eighty.

But be silent, Jacques, some one is knocking at the door, although the blow is so light that it can only come from a very small finger. Conceal yourself at my bedside, my friend, and I will tell you all; be calm. . . .

XVII.

MARCH 26.

AFTER the departure of the doctor yesterday, I delayed such a long time before going back to the chamber of M. de Civreuse, wishing to give him the opportunity of writing wholly without interruption, that finally I was at a loss how and when to go back. To knock and enter and seat myself in my customary place, was to force him to enter into a conversation with me, and on the other hand, to leave him long might look like neglect, and subject him to inconvenience if he were in want of anything.

I should have sent Benoit, but my aunt, who pretended to be entirely ignorant of the presence of the injured man, had overwhelmed her with work for several days, and she still held her captive in her room under the pretext of shaking out her curtains.

Then an idea came to me, and calling my dog very softly, I made him understand what I desired of him, and where he must carry the paper which I attached to his collar; and approaching the door, I knocked lightly, quite concealing myself, and motioned him to enter.

Upon the paper I had written: "I beg M. de Civreuse to say whether he wishes to remain alone.

or whether he is in need of anything. The dog will bring back the reply, or will wait Monsieur's pleasure. Simply say to him: "Gô."

A moment later, I heard "Ua" scratching at the door, and upon his collar I found my note, on the back of which was written:—"M. de Civreuse scarcely dares to confess that he is dying of hunger and thirst, and that the faithful messenger, in turning around to extend to him his neck, has just upset the table and inkstand. M. de Civreuse is exceedingly sorry not to be able to pick them up himself."

Upon that I entered, and with a turn of my hand I placed the table upon its feet again, and wiped up the ink as well as I could, while M. de Civreuse said to me, in a tone of inquiry: "Mademoiselle d'Épine? or Mademoiselle d'Erlange?"

"Mademoiselle d'Erlange," I replied quickly, little pleased at the confusion of names.

"Pardon me," he said, "there are aunts at almost any age;" then, as I was tapping the floor with the toe of my boot, he began to excuse himself for the accident, upon which I reassured him by replying that nothing was so indifferent to me as a stain, provided it was not upon my own person, which was the actual truth.

I asked him immediately if he had any particular wish respecting his food, warning him that the larder at Erlange was very rustic; and he replied that when he prepared for this journey, he was by no means

sure of finding something to eat every day, and he considered himself fortunate to be able to dine regularly, whatever the menu might be.

I succeeded in stealing Benoite from my aunt for a quarter of an hour, and finished the preparations after she had gone, pouring the wine, cutting the bread, and so forth. While eating it with a delightful appetite, M. de Civreuse plied me with questions, always in a cold and slightly indifferent tone, which not only froze me, but which must have made me reply very foolishly, I think, for he looked at me from time to time as if I had just uttered the greatest nonsense in the world. and shortly afterwards I set myself about making his coffee.

My nurse had left me some water, which was boiling over the coals, also some coffee, and had given me many instructions: but, merciful heavens! it was such a new work for me, that at the outset, I perceived that I no longer remembered a word of what she had told me, and I remained kneeling before the fire, the boiling water in one hand and the coffee in the other, in terrible perplexity.

I ought to put one into the other, I knew that very well, but with which to begin and in what way to put them together, that was the difficulty.

To pour the water into the wooden box which contained the coffee, seemed queer to me; it was more likely that I ought to put the coffee into the boiling water. If I returned to Benoite to ask her

what to do, it would mean giving myself up to an hour of exclamations and reproaches from my aunt, but on the other hand, M. de Civreuse was following me with his eye from the bed, with a cool curiosity that exasperated me. I therefore decided promptly, and I emptied the box into the water with a single turn, and put it all back upon the fire to simmer a moment.

"Do you wish me to serve you, Monsieur?" I asked immediately afterwards, as I approached him.

"Certainly," he replied without hesitation, holding out his cup. . . .

Alas! it was a veritable mud that I poured out, black, thick, and unsightly enough to make one shudder; it settled in the bottom of the cup in the most unappetizing manner.

I stopped then, utterly disconcerted, exclaiming:

"That is not right! Evidently I have made a mistake; but I do not know how to make coffee!"

"Nor I either," replied Monsieur Pierre, still holding out his cup; "but I think that they serve it from *that* usually." — And he pointed out to me, with his finger, the coffee-pot which Benoîte had placed upon the table and of which I had never thought; and I asked him quickly why he had not spoken of it.

"I thought that you were making it in Turkish style," he replied.

At last I strained a cupful of it through a square of linen, and he drank it, without shrinking, to the last drop.

"So you have resumed your true shape?" he said to me afterwards, just as I was seating myself according to my custom, in my easy-chair.

"My true shape? . . . but I am always like this."

"Not last night!"

"Ah! because I had put on that old gown! Indeed, I must have presented a strange appearance . . . and I wonder what you thought when you saw me thus?"

"I thought that I had at last the good fortune to find a place where time had stopped his clock, and had not gone on again for two hundred years."

"Why the good fortune?"

"Because I know nothing more absurd than the present age!" he replied.

And immediately I answered:—

"Ah, well! I know something that is yet more absurd, it is not to know this present age at all, and such is my misfortune!"

"Be satisfied, you resemble it more than you think!" he replied. Then, as if he thought that the remark that he had made was not quite polite, he went on before I had time to answer a word:—

"And your dog, Mademoiselle, why have you left him outside? It is not on my account, I hope?"

"But I am afraid that he may tire you!" And as he made a sign in the negative, I ran to open the door, and that fool of a "Un" entered at a bound, rolling over upon my feet, putting his muzzle upon my

knees, and half upsetting me in the ardor of his caresses.

M. de Civreuse watched his antics without saying anything, and just as I was kneeling down to permit him to put his paws about my neck:—

“You love him very much?” he asked.

“Infinitely!” I replied with fervor. . . . “My poor old nurse first, and him last; these two possess my dearest affections!”

“And the aunt, she is third in the line then?” he said in a low voice, speaking rather to himself than to me, I thought.

I murmured in the same tone:—

“Not even that!” but he did not hear, I think; and I rose to clear off the table.

A moment later he asked the time, and as I told him, I could not refrain from adding:—

“I am afraid that the days will seem cruelly long to you here, and that you will be terribly bored in a short time.”

“Oh! I am not thinking of myself,” he replied at once; “I am afraid for you. What a charge, what a task, what a trouble, this sick stranger who is suddenly thrust into your house, is going to bring to you!”

He was going to begin a chapter of thanks, when I quickly interrupted him:—

“Oh, do not think that: it is quite the contrary! I am so delighted at it! . . . it is so diverting!”

I was thinking of my solitude in speaking thus, and of the joy of having a living soul near me for two months at least; but he understood it otherwise, I believe, for he continued, pressing his lips tightly together and ceremoniously inclining his head: —

“Ah, so much the better, the misfortune is good for something then, and I am delighted to see that some one at least will be pleased with this affair!”

Benoite entered at that moment, and I took advantage of her entrance to glide out of the room, for I no longer knew what to say.

To sum it all up, this gentleman does not please me at all, and if I had not a passionate wish to obtain his pardon and to make him forget little by little my deplorable violence, I should become prejudiced against him at once and should show it to him without dissimulation.

His imperturbable coldness has the effect of a bridle upon me, with which he seeks to restrain my natural buoyancy of spirit, as if he had a right to do so; and that mocking eye of his which follows all that I do tempts me to utter insolent things. When once his bandage is taken off, and there are two eyes instead of one, it will be no longer endurable, and it seems to me that through the door I feel them already fixed upon me. . . .



"BENT HIS HEAD TO SHOW ME A LITTLE WHITE PAPER
ATTACHED TO HIS COLLAR."



PIERRE TO JACQUES.

My friend, I have discovered all. I manœuvred so skilfully during a tête-a-tête which chance brought about for me with Benoîte, the body-guard of Mlle. d'Erlange, that I made her relate all that the doctor thought best to withhold from me in his recital.

But first, I left you, I think, watching behind my curtain, for the entrance of my blond fairy of the past night, and very curious to see her in the clear daylight.

Ah, well! my friend, you may believe me when I tell you that the magic continued, and she presented herself under the familiar and sympathetic form of a great shaggy Newfoundland.

The intelligent animal walked without hesitation towards my bed, and sitting up upon his hind legs, with the grace of a circus elephant, bent down his head in order to show me a little white paper which was attached to his collar. And you remember: "And then the beautiful Princess dispatched to him a messenger under the form of a three-headed hippogriff, blacker than Hades, to declare her wishes in detail."

The wishes this time were indited in a simple style, and amounted very nearly to this: "What does M. de Civreuse really desire?" The writing, dishevelled like the branches of a willow on a windy day, was traced without ceremony from top to bottom of a

little square of paper, and the last words, written very small, actually climbed upon one another.

It gave me at once an unpleasant impression of the author! Let a woman not write at all unless she wishes, but if she attempts to do it, let it be prettily done, instead of making the traces of her pen resemble the fantastic promenade of a frightened June-bug! I cannot help this feeling, for it produces upon me the same effect as if I should see a little marquise draw from her pocket a great cotton handkerchief, or perfume herself with patchouli.

However, as it was not the proper time to philosophize, and as the dog's outstretched neck reminded me that an answer was required, I confessed brutally that I was desperately hungry, and that my highest ambition for the moment was to have something to put between my teeth. This was not a madrigal, far from it, but, *ma foi*, to a woman who cannot write! Then as I bent over to attach the ribbon to the collar, the dog made a movement, and with a single push of his shoulder sent the table to the ground, inkstand and all.

Properly abashed, I added a *post scriptum* to announce the misfortune, and a minute afterwards my young guardian of the past night entered.

She was dressed this time in an ordinary gown, and had twisted her hair into a figure eight; and she so much resembled the common class of women, that she had upon me the incongruous effect of a Velas-

quez portrait that had been restored by putting a child's head in place of a respectable Burgundian peasant woman's. . . . Can one have at hand so much local color and not make use of it!

Regardless, I believe, of the effect she produced upon me, she repaired the disaster without saying a word—raising the table, sopping up the ink, and pushing a piece of cloth over the floor with the toe of her boot.

I had at first begun to excuse myself as humbly as possible, but at the first words, she stopped me so quickly by saying:—"Oh! do not be troubled, these stains are nothing to me!" that I made no further attempt. Then she went out to prepare the nourishment and I remained alone with my thoughts.

My dear friend, this young girl is already positively displeasing to me. Her appearance corresponded exactly with her writing, and this last phrase finished her for me. I also, *parbleu*, care nothing for stains, and I have seen with a serene eye more than one stream of ink flow; but in her, this shocks me.

If there is one thing that displeases me above all, it is to discover in others, particularly in a woman, my principal faults. Good heavens! I know my face, and when I wish to see it, have only to approach a mirror: I do not want to be forced to find my grimace stamped upon the face of every one. As far as so much ugliness is concerned, I like a change, and my eagle's beak accommodates itself better to the

neighborhood of the little turned-up noses than to that of its equals.

Upon her return she commenced serving me the repast which the old woman had just brought up, moving about full of alacrity and good-will, but with such absolute want of skill, that presently I would not even ask her for bread. For with every slice she was within half an inch of cutting her thumb off, the china knocked together under her fingers, and you could not have seen anything the least feminine about this young girl.

"It was timidity and your devilish green eyes that made her nervous," you are ready to say to me. So be it, then ! Am I also to blame for the coffee, which she prepared for me with her own hands, and which I drank even to the dregs ?

Ah ! my friend, every man has his cup which he must drink in this world while awaiting those which purgatory has in reserve for him ; I know it, and I resign myself to it ; but with what intolerable bitterness was mine filled that day !

From the distance, I had watched Mademoiselle d'Erlange kneeling before the fire preparing her mixture with all the evidences of skill, and although it seemed to me slightly unusual, still my own inexperience forbade hasty judgments until I had tasted it at least. But then !

Have you in your past, as a child, any recollections of puddings soured or spoiled, which made you weep

at the deception? And can you yet see that thick and troubled concoction where grains of an unexplained origin floated and multiplied? My poor Jacques, it was indeed that which she offered to me ! I confess that I was vexed, to have the flavor of this Mocha vanish in the smoke, and it made me knit my brows.

I hear you pitying the poor girl, and blaming me for my disagreeableness. Ah ! my dear friend, keep your pity, her discomfiture did not last long, I assure you ; and indeed, I believe that she was only waiting for a sign from me to burst into laughter.

But, *ma foi*, I did not find it funny at all ; I did not move, and possessed with the idea of repairing everything, she thought of an expedient which appeared to her so fine that she announced it to me with a cry of joy. She ran to a wardrobe, drew forth a handkerchief, and began to strain for me a cup of her horrible drink through one of the corners of the linen which she delicately raised. The strainer was very white, I admit, but the choice of it was questionable and little calculated to sooth my susceptibilities !

I drank ! What would you have done ? But that bitter taste, with that little after-flavor of lavender, of vervain, or I do not know what, imparted by the linen, was atrocious !

Then, with a consciousness of a duty accomplished, she seated herself in her great easy-chair, her head

reaching scarcely three-quarters of the way up its back, and I attempted to make her talk.

Do you wish to hear the order and number of her affections? She made no mystery of them: her old nurse, her dog, and that is all; for her aunt really counts for nothing with her. . . . As for my accident, she has given me her opinion upon it without being urged. That amuses her! Oh! that amuses her so much! She has never seen anything funnier than this adventure! At least, I shall have the satisfaction of thinking that this can divert some one, if not myself!

Established upon this footing our conversation languished, as you can understand, but the duenna entered very seasonably to relieve us from our difficulty. Mademoiselle d'Erlange fled, and I, who unfortunately could not do the same, squared myself upon my pillows, very determined not to let Benoite depart, since Benoite was there, until I had squeezed from her old head all the revelations which it contained.

But our two wills upon this point seemed to be diametrically opposed, and she appeared as determined to be silent as I was to make her speak. So during a full quarter of an hour, we literally played at hide-and-seek with each other, she finessing, and I bringing her straight back to the subject, only to see her again glide between my fingers, until I captured the fortress, like a hussar!

My friend, if you still dare defend those little delicate fingers which moved the china about so gently and knew how to prepare such delicious coffee, it is their own mark which I carry upon my forehead, and my antipathy against Mlle. d'Erlange was prescience!

Bad intentions? I do not say that, but a slightly lively action, you will admit, I think: above all, when you know the nature of the projectile employed. It was heavy, massive, and of excellent metal. Do you guess it? Of course not, if I should let you guess a hundred times, you would not be any more enlightened.

Do you see on the other side of my room that statue of St. Joseph, which is withdrawn so far into its corner that it seems to be going through the wall? It is a beautiful work, very delicate, chiselled out of solid silver, which I attribute without hesitation to the Italian school, and which might bear the mark of Cellini, the work upon it is so exquisite! Nevertheless, that is the instrument of my misfortune! . . .

In order that you may understand how the attack was made upon me, let us go back a few days. Picture to yourself Mlle. d'Erlange, then so penetrated with the virtues of this saint, so trustful of him, so filled with a passionate veneration for him that the greater part of her days was passed at his feet!

Then all at once, without any apparent reason, whether from some disappointment or from weariness, a complete schism took place between them, and the

young suppliant passed quickly from one sentiment to another, becoming as fiery in her anger as before she had been humble in her humility, and in a tempest of wrath she ended by throwing the respected statue ignominiously out of the window.

To cease praying to it was not enough ! The old Sicambrians are not the only ones who like to burn those whom they have worshipped ; and besides, as the good Benoîte said to me, sighing : “ My girl never does things by halves ! ” So far I have nothing to say of this way of acting. I do not know the griefs of this young rebel, it was her right perhaps, and in any case it was strictly her affair ! But the saddest part of it is that while she was playing this little domestic scene in the usual way of the world, an innocent person was getting ready to suffer for the guilty !

You guess it, my friend ! this time the lamb in the fable was to be myself, and the hour when the most ill-advised of reveries led me upon this deserted road of which I have already told you, was also the precise moment when Mlle. d'Erlange sent the poor saint flying out into the country, committing thus the double crime of attempting the life of her neighbor and of inflicting the most mortifying treatment upon an object of devotion.

The saint, however, without troubling himself at all, and forgetting his strictly sacred and pacific character, fell upon me with a force like the bursting of

a professional bomb-shell. And that is how, without any appreciable crime with which society or the gods could reproach me, I have been placed at the very verge of death, and am threatened with a useless knee, or at least with one badly weakened; and all because a little girl and a silver statue had a quarrel.

How does Mlle. d'Erlange appear to you now? Do you not think that you can see claws growing under her rosy nails? and will you be entirely tranquil henceforth during the hours in which she alone will watch over me? I await with indescribable curiosity the explanation which will take place between us on this subject. Will this haughty Amazon show any confusion? Nothing is less certain, and I am concentrating my utmost resources to get out of it with the honors of war.

I am the victim! It is indisputable, and she must not be allowed to forget it, and if she takes the affair too lightly, I will snatch off my bandage, as they do on the last page of the romances of Anne Radcliffe, and I will show her my gaping wound! . . .

XVIII.

MARCH 29.

BENOÎTE has spoken, M. Pierre knows all ! *Mon Dieu !* what shall I say, and how shall I present myself before him ? These are the words which I repeated to myself incessantly yesterday and without finding a reply.

In one respect I am rather glad that all is confessed. Badly defined situations have always been odious to me, and I remember the time when as a little girl I asked of my aunt "two slaps immediately" rather than wait for the punishment which she was reserving for me in the evening. Now I am to be punished again, and I shall not be sorry to learn quickly what I am to expect. But the manner of presenting myself, with what words to begin ! It is always this which will not come to me, or at least which repeatedly escapes me as soon as I approach the fatal door.

Ten times during the afternoon I drew near enough to half-turn the handle of the door ; but I was always seized with fear at the last moment, and drew back before having finished my action. It really seemed to me that all my ideas remained heaped up in the library, which I have made both my

retreat and my room for some time ; for as soon as I found myself there the words came to me in a crowd. I gesticulated with fervor, and sentences most suitable to move a haughty heart pressed upon my lips. I advanced to a divan upon which I imagined M. de Civreuse to be extended, in order that the rehearsal might be complete, and seizing the corner of a cushion as I propose to seize his hand : —

“Monsieur,” I said in a tone of deep emotion, “pardon me, I pray you ! I have committed a foolish action ; remorse will remain with me always, and I can never think of it without terror ; but see how unhappy I am ! and tell me, I beg you, that you do not bear too much ill-will against me ! Without that I know I can never say a good word to myself, and I hate to live at war with my conscience, for the reproaches which I heap upon myself are much harder than any that you could think of !”

The cushion would raise my hand to its lips and courteously kiss the tips of my fingers, and give me absolution without requiring to be urged. Thereupon I would go back again, filled with my subject ; but in passing my door, my speech would begin to be a little disturbed ; in crossing the antechamber half of it would escape me, and the rest would vanish during the remainder of the journey, so that I arrived at the decisive place with empty hands !

Then I would hastily retrace my steps, when, as by some inexplicable witchcraft, my ideas would come,

rising up from the floor, coming forth from the wainscoting, and would fill again the vacant places, so that when I drew near to the symbolic divan. I had recovered my ease, and was once more prepared to soften him by words analogous to the former, but much more persuasive.

But I could not go on like this forever ; the day was closing, and I could not condemn M. de Civreuse to darkness because I did not dare to enter his room to bring him a lamp. It was evident that as long as I remained in this condition, I should be subjected to the same ridiculous alternations of mind, and it only remained for me to take myself by surprise.

Accordingly with lowered head, like one absolutely impelled, I opened the door, and, swift as an arrow, I came near his bed, trusting in my lucky star to find that happy word so necessary to begin with, and which was going to come to me this time surely.

But M. de Civreuse, after having bowed to me, began to look behind me, in such a singular way, bending over in order to see better and keeping his eye so obstinately fixed upon the door, that notwithstanding my preoccupation, I turned around under the impression that I was dragging in with my gown some unknown or peculiar object. There was nothing at all, and as I looked at him in great surprise : —

“I thought you were pursued, Mademoiselle,” he said to me quietly.

Then he laid his head back once more upon his

pillow with a gesture of relief, letting his eyelids fall with a languid air, and so very much at his ease, so little prepared for the affecting explanations which I was reserving for him, that many a one bolder than I would have lost courage as I did. Erect, motionless, with evident perplexity in my look, all the while trying but unable to speak, with my lamp still in my hand, as I had forgotten to set it down, I felt so extremely awkward that I would have given anything to any one who would have shown me how to assume the self-possessed attitude of M. de Civreuse, or who would have told me at least how to place my hands and feet naturally, the management of which had never seemed so difficult to me before.

Meantime, he leaned back with the majestic nonchalance of a Roman emperor, having no awkward movement to fear in his easy situation, and insolently enjoying to the full extent his advantage.

This state of affairs could not last long without becoming ridiculous, moreover this provoking coldness acted upon me like the stroke of a whip. Since he did not wish to help me, *ma foi*, so much the worse ! I would speak frankly, satisfactorily or not, and explain the affair to him without ceremony.

My mind was now so fully made up to this, that I advanced one step more, and put the lamp upon the table.

"Monsieur," I commenced rapidly, "here is your lamp : " — this was all in the shape of originality I had

been able to find as a beginning, — “and I beg you to believe that I regret exceedingly the deplorable accident from which you still suffer ; but really it was not my fault !”

“*Mon Dieu*, I do not think that any one could justly accuse *me* of it !” said he, calmly raising his head and looking at me.

“I do not say that !” I stammered, losing countenance.

And as he shook his head with an air which signified : “So ? well that is fortunate !” I replied, breaking quickly in :—“I mean to say that I very well know that it is my fault in reality ; but what I intended to say is that I did not do it intentionally.”

“Mademoiselle, I believe you,” he said, with his mocking smile.

“For indeed,” I said, becoming animated, “how could I know that there was any one there ? This road belongs to us, and usually no one passes this way.”

“That is certain,” replied he, with the same coolness ; “I was the one who came along just at the wrong time, and as soon as I entered upon your land you were quite in your right. Have not the Seignors the power of life and death over their own lands, and has not each one liberty indeed to decide his quarrels in his own way without crying :—‘look out’ ? It is the duty of those passing to raise their heads and avoid the blows !”

"Ah, Monsieur," I cried, in the height of indignation, "you make me say foolish things which you know very well I do not mean, and you reply very unkindly instead of granting the pardon that I ask of you!"

And as I felt that my tears were conquering me in spite of all my efforts, I was going to save myself by flight, when he stopped me with a gesture, forgetting this time his insupportable coldness:—

"Mademoiselle, I beg your pardon now. I am a brute, and I ought to be flogged for having made my devoted nurse cry, when she has watched so kindly over me! Do you pardon me?"

But it is one thing to make the tears flow and quite another to stop them. I smiled, I replied:—"Yes, yes," with my head: but they had commenced, it was necessary for them to have their course, and I bit my lips in vain, wiped my eyes upon my handkerchief squeezed into a little ball, but in spite of all that I could do, I still resembled a small fountain.

From time to time, M. de Civreuse repeated his excuses, and *ma foi*, at the bottom of my heart, I was not sorry to see at last in that great glacial eye a little anxiety and embarrassment. After all the trouble that he had caused me for a fortnight, it was only fair. However, it was unintentional on my part, and I calmed myself as soon as I could, for I saw how much this little episode troubled him, and we both began to speak at the same time as soon as I had found my voice:—

"Then you do not bear any grudge against me?"

"You truly pardon me then?"

I extended my hand, taking up the thread of my program where I had left it off; he contented himself with pressing it very gently, and he added, laughing, but this time without any mockery:—

"A complete amnesty, is it not, even for him?"—And he pointed out to me with his finger the unfortunate statue of my St. Joseph, who was back again, by I do not know what miracle, in one of the corners of the room.

I reddened up to my eyes, increasing thus the warmth of my face, which I already felt was burning,—even my nose I thought swollen and deplorably shining,—and as I answered nothing, M. de Civreuse, afraid lest I should begin to cry again, hastened to add:—

"Be composed, Mademoiselle. I know nothing of the nature of your sorrows; I only know the punishment without the cause."

"I should think so, indeed," I replied, "for you would be obliged to read my mind for that. I have told no one anything about it."

He did not insist and I went out to bathe my eyes.

The doctor, who has just gone, is delighted with the forehead of his patient. He said that the wound was healing with miraculous rapidity; but as for the knee, he confessed to me in confidence, that he did not see that it was any better at present, and that

time and an absolute quiet are the only things which can effect a complete cure. May the heavens grant that M. de Civreuse consents to swallow with a good grace these two bitter medicines !

As for me, it is with a relief too great for words, that I remain now near my sick man. There is no longer a painful explanation to be dreaded between us, and although his humor may not be sensibly softened, still this fact puts me much more at my ease.

As for him, he remains a little gloomy, always cold, and with that tendency towards irony which shows itself at every turn.

"I was born a grumbler, you see," he said to me just now. "and as no one thought of pulling out this bad weed in my youth, it has now grown to be a small oak which is quite beyond my power to uproot."

"And what do your friends say about it?" I asked him.

"They are generally used to it, or when they become tired of it, they lop off a few branches."

"They are very kind indeed," I could not prevent myself from replying; "in their place I should seek another shade tree than this little oak; it does not seem to me safe!"

He frowned. It is his way when he is not pleased, and as he did not wish to say anything, and I have discovered that that signifies in plain terms: -- "Leave me alone!" I have done so, and here I am in my room.

After all, I am like his friends, — I find that there is a great deal to lop off among the branches of this oak, and that it has grown gnarly, although vigorous.

PIERRE TO JACQUES.

My friend, do you know of an argument more commonplace and at the same time more irresistible than tears? It is old as sin, every one makes use of it, and every one also knows the simplicity of the process, and yet every one is softened by it in spite of himself. Eve obtained her first pardon and sealed her first reconciliation by means of this benevolent liquid, and Mlle. d'Erlange, — be it said without comparison, — made such good use of it just now, that not only has peace been signed between us, but it is I myself who have asked pardon.

Imagine a rôle at the same time more ridiculous and more annoying than that of a man who makes a woman cry, when that woman is an entire stranger to him! Eyes buried in her handkerchief, her voice stifled, her explanations broken by great sobs, and coming to you only in fragments, it makes one feel like a great brute, and one is helpless what to do or say. To look at her is indiscreet, to turn away one's head is cynical, for it might be interpreted: "I do not care!" and so it only remains to swear that one is a wretch, and humbly to beg pardon.

I do not know that you would feel like this, and my being unaccustomed to it probably impresses

me all the more. When I am told of wounds or of broken arms, I know what is meant, I have had them. But these tears, this hurrying flood, impetuous, uninterrupted, so little resembling the tears that I have shed (rare tears and always shed in secret), that I look at them with the vague fright which one feels towards the unknown, wondering when and how they are going to stop, and how Mlle. d'Erlange will feel after them, and if she does not risk being dissolved as entirely as a Naiad feeding some living stream! these I know nothing about. Therefore I was ready for all necessary capitulations, and thought myself happy to exchange grief for grief, and to give her my full pardon in return for that which I should receive from her.

There remains only this poor saint, a reconciliation with whom she does not wish to hear mentioned! I have attempted to act as mediator, but the facts of the case must have been very severe, for she remains cold, and I do not wish, by an intemperate zeal, to compromise a peace so newly made and so dearly bought.

And here was I who had completely settled the conditions of this interview, and who was going to subject this foolish girl to my just wrath, who had even arranged in my mind all the disagreeable truths I was going to say to her and which it would be well for her to hear sometime, asking pardon myself! You laugh, traitor! it is out of place, I assure

you, for never was I less inclined to give you that satisfaction! . . . Our peace, besides, is only an armed peace. There is an understanding upon one point, but upon one point only. We are not to speak from henceforth of the reason which procures for us the pleasure of this tête-à-tête of a month's duration, of which I cannot think without a shudder; but, aside from that, reasons for dissension will not be lacking to us, I believe.

Picture to yourself all the contraries in the world: white and black, water and fire, two horses perpetually whipped into a gallop in opposite directions, so that they hit each other regularly every time they go round the ring, and you will see us in this great wainscoted room where I am being glued together again like the most common of knick-knacks, tied carefully with thread until it is perfectly dry.

And yet, no; hold; my definition is bad. Do not read absolute opposition, for she resembles me, my friend, and it is that which is so odious to me, as I have already said! She wears a gown,—is adorned with a head of hair *ad hoc*, such as I could not lay claim to except in the warlike days of the Merovingians, she is endowed with a fine candor and with a naïvete which evidently no longer belongs to me, but apart from that, we are twin brothers! Now for a woman, you will agree with me, there might be a better model to take than your friend. and she would gain assuredly in grace and charm all

that she would lose from her likeness to me. Among all people, the species called *bien garçon* has always displeased me most. I should like her better if she were a dreamer, a coquette, a prude, romantic, anything you will, in short, that would permit me, during my seclusion, to make a study from life of something different, rather than with this jovial and capricious assurance which translates itself by the classical "shake hands," imported among us by the pointed elbows and the nervous hands of the daughters of Albion, which is the thing I least pardon them for, next to their ugliness. Just now in the midst of her tears, she was already more of a woman. I do not mean to say by this, that during that time I was much more amused, or that I was entirely at my ease; but I like the respect due to old customs, and I wish to see young girls timid, submissive, a little cowardly if need be, a little idealistic, an octave higher than we are in fact, like the difference between the masculine and feminine voices!

But I shall only divert myself the better perhaps. I went out in search of a new country, of strange types, of original individuals to study, and they say what the French certainly know least about, is France! Let us study France, my friend, since we are here; and receive the notes of a traveller with the same kindness as if they came from the sacred banks of the Ganges, or the no less sacred summits of the Himalayas. They will have at least the merit of more freshness

than after that long journey, and when one thinks of all the pretty things which Bernardin de Saint Pierre succeeded in discovering under a single strawberry leaf. I should prove myself very unobserving not to find as much in the acre and more which surrounds me.

But here I am far from my subject : I browse among philosophical considerations like a simple donkey among the bushes by the wayside, and the equipage in which I drive you jolts a little, I think. You wish the story, do you not ? We left off at the tears of Mlle. d'Erlange, if I remember rightly, and I wager that you picture to yourself good-naturedly that with a single word I was going to stop them, as I must confess I had made them flow ; I begged her pardon, it was granted, and afterwards we were better friends.

Oh ! my friend, may God guard you from ever provoking a crisis of which you cannot see yourself master at the end of an instant, for it is terrible ! One feels one's self small before an overflowing torrent they say, because it is something impossible to resist that flows near you. . . . What would you say, then, to the tears of a young girl ! Can one bank them up more than a torrent ? I made myself gentle, I made myself humble ; in truth, I became insipid, and the flood still rolled on, and it was marvellous to see always that same little handkerchief, as large as the palm of my hand, turned, returned, kneaded in every

way, and still sufficing for the work ! Folded, it filled just the hollow of an eye, indeed it was necessary to wipe them alternately ; but it was done with a movement so prompt that one could hardly perceive that it had been doubled up again, and in spite of the uneasiness that I felt, I could not prevent myself from following curiously this admirable dexterity !

I must say, however, that Mlle. d'Erlange did not abuse the situation ; she calmed herself as soon as she could and extended her hand without rancor, I believe ; and at my request seated herself near me, instead of running away as had manifestly been her intention.

It remained for me to make reparation, and "*le quart d'heure de Rabelais*" of my want of tact was to be settled by many amiabilities, I foresaw. It was necessary to lay myself out, to amuse her, to talk, to take away from my brutality all that had been too violent, and I think that I have not got out of the difficulty very badly !

At the beginning great sobs cut her words in two, the true sobs of a child in distress, and a tear which passed from time to time to the edge of her eyelids called for the intervention of the famous handkerchief : but, little by little, she became more animated, so much so, indeed, that at the end of a moment it was difficult to follow her.

She likes to talk : she does it with vivacity, without any great connection, as if it was simply a

question of a hygienic exercise for the tongue. Questions, reflections, facts, precipitate themselves in a curious medley; she takes even her ideas in the lump without trying to sort them out, and throws them as one throws grain to the sparrows, "Hop, hop! catch it who can!" I wager, indeed, that the parable of the sower in the Gospel has not made her dream often, and that losing seed among the thorns by the roadside and upon the arid rocks does not trouble her in the least!

Do not imagine, however, that it is common gossip; her untiring animation is rather a superabundance of life, if I am not mistaken, and she expends her energy in that way because she cannot throw off the superfluity sufficiently in any other way, although she takes trouble enough about it, I assure you! While talking she goes back and forth, teasing her dog, arranging and disarranging the fire twenty times an hour, so that she half extinguishes it and fills the room with smoke. Then she opens the window, with an apology, and puts on such a big log that the flames from it lick the front of the fireplace, and have to be sprinkled with water to keep us from a greater misfortune.

Seated, she draws successively her two feet under her, after the manner of the Turks, — as she made her coffee, — and balances her body, while talking, in a manner causing the greatest anxiety for her equilibrium, which she preserves, however, in a marvellous

fashion, for one must do her justice, and I become almost breathless when following her with my eye.

"I find you feverish," said my doctor to me a short time afterwards; "what has happened? Have we given you solid food too soon, and must we go back to dosing you again with the broths of the sick man?"

"Dose this Will-o'-the-wisp, rather!" I wished to reply.

But taking everything into consideration, you see, Jacques, fourteen hours of solitude a day when one's feet are tied would be terribly monotonous, without these little interludes, so we must not say too much.

Our varied conversation has put me in the way of understanding much that surrounds me, both people and things.

The château of which I have spoken, very pompously perhaps, is decidedly not all that I expected, and, like the scenery of a theatre, behind the façade that it shows to the public, it conceals more than one deception. Its splendor dates from Louis XIII, and its decadence from the Revolution; that proves, M. Prudhomme would say, that good fortune lasts longer upon this earth than bad fortune, whatever is said to the contrary, which signifies, I believe, very clearly, that a hundred years is the extreme limit during which stones consent to hold themselves upright without the help of any one. However this may be, there have already disappeared from this noble

building one entire wing, a clock tower, and two turrets.

They have crumbled away without violence, as well-behaved towers should, like people too tired to remain standing, and who seat themselves upon the earth for want of a better place. Then the ivy, which they have drawn down with them, has become green, or the simple grasses, and the gillyflowers, which no one thinks of disturbing, have commenced to bloom, and the year following the birds build there, finding a safe shelter, and a fragrant flower-garden.

"The history of all old walls," you will say to me. "I know your ruin without your describing it: they are all alike, these decaying châteaux!"

And the way in which the proprietors conduct themselves, is that the same everywhere also? And do you think that you have seen many places where they act as they do here at Erlange, under such circumstances?

When the cracks multiply too rapidly, when their half-open doors take the look of people uttering their last sigh, and the stones shake decidedly on the days when there is a high wind, each collects his personal effects, or gets together all that can be handled without too much difficulty, and philosophically transports himself and his baggage to another more hospitable part which is still standing.

After that, the first whirlwind has a right to the timbers thus abandoned, it tosses them about and it

becomes the palace of the polecats and the owls, while the emigrants rebuild their nests beside them, accommodating themselves to their new surroundings, discovering their advantages and their disadvantages, not more affected than a tribe of Gauls, who have broken camp in the morning to change their hunting-grounds.

Thus they have already left successively the tower on the south for the tower on the north, the right wing for the centre, and if the centre yields in its turn, — *mon Dieu*, with these snows which crush it, one must be prepared for everything, — there will still remain the left wing repaired more recently, then a tower (two towers indeed, I believe), a chapel, and the servants' quarters.

This is all there is to assure a habitation to the descendants of Mlle. d'Erlange, and, more particularly to this mysterious aunt, who is still unknown to me, and whom I sometimes find myself regarding as a veritable myth.

All this is certainly the very extreme of philosophy, if not of madness, and yet it is a fact. Mlle. d'Erlange appears, indeed, to find the thing very simple. One would say, on hearing her, that she was speaking of the most insignificant change, like that of a person moving his seat in a garden when the sun had driven him from the shade of a tree, or something analogous.

"Since it was falling, what would you have done?"

said she on seeing me open my eye wide ; "would you have remained? "

"No, but I would have restored it!" I replied.

"With whom? With Benoîte and myself as masons, and Françoise to mix the mortar for us with her hoofs?"

"Who is Françoise?"

"My mare, a good old animal that stumbles on entering her stable. I will show her to you some day. She is my third affection."

"But do you not think," I could not prevent myself from saying, "that it is a pity to allow such a beautiful old dwelling to crumble away, and does your aunt not feel it so?"

"Pooh!" she replied, shrugging her shoulders and laughing ironically, "my aunt well knows that the last part of the wall of Erlange will survive her, and since she is certain of a shelter to the end of her days, what do you think that she cares about the "afterwards" ?

I did not dare to say more, the question was becoming too personal, and we came back to generalities. Very joyously my young interlocutor related to me how she had furnished her room, taking from each of the other rooms what remained in it, and even going so far as to seize the praying-stools in the chapel.

Thus is explained the monastic and bizarre profusion of religious stalls which had struck me upon my first awakening.

She calls these her "*chaises volantes*," and while speaking, she drew them one after the other up to my bedside that I might see them.

"They are all alike, there is no variety, is there?" said she, turning them about, "but they look rather pretty near my sofas. Have you seen the tapestry on my sofas?"

And she seized hold of one of them, drawing it up to me, rolling it from one end of the room to the other with a frightful noise, and pushing it back against the wall with the same rapidity.

From all this I have learned, then, that the château is as dilapidated within as without, and I have caught myself wondering what band of robbers despoiled it? Carelessness and thoughtlessness would not have sufficed, and Time does not carry away a piece of furniture upon his back for himself alone unless poverty helps him a little. This idea troubles me, for my presence in that case must be a heavy charge upon my hostesses, and I was thinking of bringing the matter up before my doctor, when Mlle. d'Erlange took the bull by the horns, by divining my thoughts, as if she instinctively perceived what was passing in my mind.

"Now you are getting anxious, Monsieur, because you find us less rich than you at first thought!" she exclaimed. "But reassure yourself! if the tables and chairs needed do not grow at Erlange, we have here all the vegetables of midsummer, to say nothing of

the hens and ducks, and as my aunt, who always looks out so well for poor me, contrives to arrange so that we do not suffer, I conclude that she has not yet come to the bottom of her woollen stocking, and that starvation does not menace us quite yet. This being the case, it would ill become you to torment yourself about that, for it is assuredly not your fault that you are here to-day, and it is the prevailing custom in all places to support one's prisoners."

This frank explanation put me entirely at my ease, and I did nothing more than to excuse myself for having dispossessed Mlle. d'Erlange of her room, begging her as a favor to take it back and have me carried elsewhere. But she refused, saying that "elsewhere" here was a pretentious word, and that for the rest, she wished to see me upon the same spot where the deed was committed, that she might make it into a sort of expiatory chapel.

All this made me understand more than one peculiarity which had struck me from the beginning in the inequalities of my table-service, and I can now explain this assemblage of Sèvres porcelain, this beautiful Venetian glass in which my wine looks like a golden fluid, and this massive silver which I do not like to see Mlle. d'Erlange handle too near me, — a striking contrast to the napkins of coarse brown linen, and this very cheap-looking knife, — which complete my table-service.

Yesterday I was making use of this knife, tearing

my meat like a young dog, employing alternately the back and the edge without any success, and I was nearly out of patience.

"It cuts badly, does it not?" said Mlle. d'Erlange, who was watching my actions with delight, "and you are angry! . . . Wait, I have something which will be just what you need."

She ran to a drawer and brought me, triumphantly, a little dagger enclosed in a carved ivory sheath, which she drew forth with a gesture which sent out a steel-blue lightning, and with a quickness which made me tremble.

"There," said she, "it cuts like an angel: I always use it for my pens. Do you wish it?"

Thus is my table-service completed, my friend, and you have now an exact idea of my shelter, as well as of the persons who surround me: the phantom aunt, the doctor, Benoite, "Un," and finally Mlle. Colette, for such is the name of Mlle. d'Erlange, as she has herself informed me, together with the reflections which it suggests to her.

"A queer name, is it not?" said she: "Col . . . Colette . . . Why not Colarette? What does it mean? and from whence could it have come?"

"From a saint in the calendar, I suppose." . . .

"It is possible! I have never thought of that! I imagined that they had invented it for me. But do you know her then, Saint Colette? Perhaps you have prayed to her to cure the toothache? They

say it is efficacious and that one is certain of a cure in addressing himself to her !”

“I confess to you that I have not !” I replied ; “on one account, because my teeth have fortunately never given me any trouble, and then your lack of success would forever deter me from making such prayers, for I could not be so foolish as to believe that I would succeed where you have failed so completely.”

She reddened to the tips of her fingers and turned aside her head ; but at the end of a moment she replied very low : —

“Oh ! it was because I asked something very difficult ; it was on that account !”

She was afraid evidently of discouraging me by her failure and of leading me into temptation or revolt, and half for her candor, and half because I feared that I had hurt her, I added by way of conclusion : —

“It is certain that one should never despair of anything, and perhaps what you wish is much nearer you than you think !”

As for Saint Colette, I do not think much of her powers, and that is the truth ; but if you hear any one speak of any of those celestial people who preside over the mending of fractures, burn a candle to him, my friend, for unfortunately I do not improve.

XIX.

MARCH 30.

AN idea came to me some time ago, and I have in vain shrugged my shoulders in its face, to show it that I thought it absurd; it remains there, firmly implanted in my mind, so that I have no room in my head for anything else.

But it is so foolish that when I write it down I close my door with three locks, and I turn over two white pages, that I may put this ridiculous thought all by itself.

Reflecting upon my last adventure, thinking over again the violent way in which I treated my poor saint, my anger, and its result, and finally the day when M. de Civreuse was brought into Erlange, I have wondered, . . . I have told myself that it was possible, . . . it came into my mind that perhaps St. Joseph had granted my prayers in spite of everything, and that M. de Civreuse was the expected saviour and hero.

I know very well that he did not come to Erlange to seek me, and that even now his manners are not in the least gallant. . . . But what a coincidence!

I asked for aid, and suddenly into my walled-up life a young man has entered, original and interest-

ing, if not amiable, and of the exact stuff of which heroes are made! Is it not a veritable Providence! Are not the obstinacy and fury of my aunt sure guarantees? Her daily assaults show me that she thinks as I do that Colette's liberator has arrived.

When I overwhelm myself with excuses before my poor statue, which I have taken back, it seems to me that he smiles upon me as formerly, and that he says to me:—"You see that you despaired too quickly, and that I did not deceive you at all!" Then a moment after, I repeat to myself that I am crazy, and the glacial eye of M. de Civreuse comes back to my memory. He cares no more for me than for my dog, and it is easy to see that he is exasperated at the accident which detains him here.

But then, if it was foreordained that he should come, he ought to be very glad, glad that he is injured into the bargain, for otherwise he would have passed on!

Does his appearance resemble in every respect the ideal of my summer dreams? I can no longer remember. For now when I try to call up the image of my beautiful gloomy hero, it is the face of M. Pierre which comes before my eyes, and I never turn back to the first pages of my note-book to see if I am mistaken, for I am satisfied with him as he is.

His forehead, which one can see but partially now, is evidently high and wide, his hair is chestnut color, and cut very short; his curved nose is rather too

long. I think, his mouth is always tightly closed, and his beard is not entirely a beard, yet something more than a mustache; I should like to ask him just what he calls it.

As for the color of his eye, or of his eyes rather, for I suppose that the other is like the one that I see, it is peculiar; it is not blue, it is not gray, and resembles nothing but the water of the stream in which I mirrored myself last year. All is there, even the shadow of the clouds which I can imagine to be passing from time to time, for the color varies according to his emotions, becoming lighter or darker in an instant.

His complexion is dark, except a line across his forehead where the skin is white up to his hair, and which looks very funny. One would think that his face had been painted with the same shade up to that point, and then that the color had given out and he had been left like that.

His manner is brusque, scarcely amiable, and he has the appearance of a man so accustomed to have his own way, that the wishes of others count for little.

I used to picture my hero to myself as a tyrant,—a tyrant to every one, but growing more gentle than this one under my influence.

But when I dream in this way, all the folly of such an idea comes back to me again. Never did a Prince Charming make himself less attractive in order to

please the lady of his choice! and I am forced to perceive that M. de Civreuse actually resembles nothing but a chained dog, a knowing dog, well brought up, a perfect adept in beautiful manners; but that he does not enjoy himself at all in his kennel is perfectly clear.

And then, would it be possible for me to adapt myself to this grim humor? One would say that I am under some weird influence, for all that I do and say is exactly the contrary of all that I ought to do and say, and I provide for the eyebrow of my patient the opportunity of incessant gymnastics, it raises itself so often in lively astonishment at my actions. But one should not be blamed after waiting eighteen years for liberty and a spark of joy. . . .

And yet Mother Lancien appeared to be so sure of her charm when she promised me success, and she has seen so many things and I so few! . . .

PIERRE TO JACQUES.

Ah! my friend, this was just what I expected, and your last letter is just like you!

You get excited, you grow enthusiastic, you build up a romance out of nothing, and send it to me by an express train, asking if you are too late, if your congratulations will come before or after the ceremony.

This accident which struck me down in the open road, this old château whither they brought me fainting, this young girl who watches over me night

and day, watering my bed with her tears—all this intoxicates you, transports you; you see me charmed, a captive to love kneeling at the feet of my beautiful lady, as well as a man with a broken knee can kneel, blessing the impassable roads because this solitude for two is joy, loving my misfortunes because they have given me access to Erlange, and the winter, because it makes our eagle's nest impregnable and inaccessible to the jealous and the curious.

Ah! my poor Jacques, I have not your inflammable temperament, nor your flights of imagination, and you must remember that formerly when we were both going into society, I had the wisdom of a gray head compared with the folly of your caprices.

While you, like a gourmand, were gorging yourself with one and even two passions every evening, and were sometimes so captivated with your partners in the dance that after the cotillon you went so far as even to think of marriage, it was with difficulty that I could give my heart once a week! And indeed, I have sometimes gone from one Sunday to another, or even for a whole fortnight, without feeling any extra pulsations.

And you wish, now that I am at variance with the whole human race, with the fine gentlemen of the "*Boulevard*" as well as with the amiable worldlings, when, above all, I have my eyes widely opened, that I should fall in love like a schoolboy, and weigh myself down with a chain at the very moment when I

am rejoicing in my freedom! . . . No! no! and if you wish the place, Jacques, by the faith of a Civreuse, I yield it to you without regret—the bed with the twisted columns, the plaster cast, and the little blonde into the bargain!

Have you forgotten already, my poor friend, the two years that have just passed? Evidently you have, since they were upon your part only a long devotion, and you would, with your shy delicacy, consider it a crime for you to recall them.

But with me it is not the same, for there are certain things the bitterness of which remain upon our lips whatever we may do to drive it away, and my experiences have been of this character.

I was such a simpleton, you see, so absurdly trustful, so convinced of the truth of everything that was said to me! I had thirty intimate friends, and I believed them all true, all devoted and sincere.

In twenty houses of Paris, people opened to me the doors of intimacy, and I who believed myself received in memory of my mother, went in and acted as if it were her hand itself held out to me, went without the shadow of a secret design,—the only one probably who had not.

Poor fool, who had forgotten only one thing: it was those three hundred thousand francs income, quite safe, quite unrestricted, that I held at my free disposal, in my two orphan hands; and like an igno-

rant donkey I took to myself the civilities which were addressed only to them !

Then one morning, the sudden ruin, you remember? My banker, a friend also, turning all my capital into unjustifiable speculations, not daring to consult me about the method before engulfing my fortune, and finally running away with all that was left, in order to begin afresh in free America; and immediately, almost at the same moment, the change in my social position that followed.

The telegraph is slow compared with the news that flies from mouth to mouth ! Four hours after my ruin I had become Pierre as before : every one knew it, and at the end of a week I was forgotten ! Events occur so quickly at Paris ! Immediately after my affair, there was the fall of a minister, a divorce tried privately, the strength and weakness of which all the newspapers bruited abroad ; and you can imagine if the wave which had engulfed me was at rest !

My intimate associations all ceased at the same time. What was the use of inviting a man who was no longer a possible suitor ? Then for the first time I perceived that in each of these select circles, the daughter of the house was invariably between eighteen and twenty years of age.

As for my friends, you see, Jacques, they were all perfect ! There was not one who did not cross the street or boulevard twice to shake my hand : and,

seeing me upon the other side of the walk, not one who did not assure me of his sympathy.

“Poor Civreuse, what bad luck!”

“What canaille is that D****, he is posted, you know? And by the way, do you intend to have your sale take place at the ‘*Hôtel Druot*’? The season is excellent: that is a fortunate thing!”

“What a plunge, my dear friend! My word, it is enough to give a man a distaste for all investments other than in his straw mattress!”

It was kind, all that, and it went straight to my heart. But at the end of a fortnight my sale had been made, my apartments rented, I no longer had my Mondays,—you remember my receptions, and my tables where all were welcome,—and I supped no more at the *Café Anglais*; more than that, I abandoned the fashionable district to go and live on the other side of the *Seine*!

Does one hunt for a needle in a haymow, or for a man who lodges in the *Jardin des Plantes*? In good faith, no! and for at least two weeks I had absolute peace, such as is ardently desired by sufferers, but in a great city where one has lived happily, it is called isolation rather than repose.

My story would have ended there, for it only remained to put a period to it, or to enclose in a parenthesis my struggle with misfortune, if by good luck, out of more than thirty intimate friends, I had not possessed another, a thirty-first, that I had never mixed up in the heap with the others.

More cunning, however, than they were, this one discovered my retreat; once in the place he opened my coffer bravely, and finding it empty as he expected, put my arm within his own and brought me to his house, where he compelled me to share his life during two whole years!

And this was not all that was offered by him, friend Jacques — permit me to say it once to your face, since I have the opportunity — it was done in such a way that from the first I accepted it, and I have lived with you like a parasite during all that time, without the shadow of an *arrière-pensée*.

Do not exclaim; it was indeed as a parasite, for you know as well as I do what the salary of people is who seek for work because they need it, and seek it from one day to another without having passed the ordeal of that administrative screw which is the glory of our France.

Exactly what I earned, I do not remember; but if I paid in the good or the bad year, during those days of trouble, one-quarter of the rent of our apartments and my laundry bill, it was because they made me concessions, I am sure of it!

What profession, indeed, could I take up? I was a painter who could enter without protest into the Salon when I was an amateur; but I became a dauber only able to obtain fifty francs for a canvas of six meters as soon as they had a suspicion that I was selling it in order to live! And as for music, one

ought not to speak of it ! A guitarist is charming on the balcony, but as a professor, what pupils could I have found ?

There remained to me the choice of being a supernumerary in finance, — three years of hopes and of ambitious dreams that one must indulge in when thinking of these appointments of fifteen hundred francs which crown this novitiate, — or diplomacy and the chance of a consulship, — without the possibility of buying myself patent leather boots and fresh gloves which furnish the sinews of war there ; — or finally, journalism.

Apart from that, when one has refused to nail his name like an ensign upon the door of an intriguer, tell me how a gentleman can find employment in Paris ?

Therefore, I thought of emigrating, and had it not been for you, there is strong reason to believe that I should have followed my rascally friend across the sea. But you were there and I remained, with a heart a little bruised, I confess, by all that I had passed through, but far from imagining the sudden turn in the tide which awaited me and which was going to permit me to complete the moral study of the human animal upon the spot.

Mon Dieu, I should only have had to open one of the pages of "La Rochefoucauld," to have found it all set down there in advance. But who believes "La Rochefoucauld" before having tasted for himself what his better wisdom unfolds ?

Briefly, I am not obliged to recall to you the denouement of the comedy which awoke me one fine morning. The turn of the wheel was complete, and Fortune brought back to me with one hand what she had taken away with the other. My old villain, richer than ever, had died intestate and without children, and his lakes of petroleum, vigorously claimed by all his dupes, were going to return to each of us our rights. Our credentials were good, and they gave us even the interest on the sums, which was the involuntary self-denial which we had practised during two years !

Three days after, Jacques, do you remember ? congratulations and cards rained in upon us, and again I was in possession of all my excellent companions. I awoke, and all that I had believed lost, returned at the same time and through the same door : gold and friendship !

But this time it was too much ! Had they shown a little patience I might have been deceived again perhaps. But on the very next day they wished to take up the old life at the precise point where they had left it off : this dinner accepted two years before, and which they now claimed of me ; that waltz, two winters old and yellowed upon the card, which they wished to recall to me ! it was vile, and it was laughable at the same time, so much so, indeed, that I did laugh, but with a heart full of contempt and indignation.

To avoid then, was not enough. They had caused me to be undeceived ; malicious and cynical I entered into all the combinations, I caressed all their hopes, I flattered all their ambitions to make the deception more complete on the day when I should break with one blow all the threads of the puppets which I was holding in my hand.

Then, embittered, wearied, forcibly separated from you by your uncle's illness and the winter of seclusion which it prepared for you, finding all words weak which could express my hatred of the human race, I was possessed with a desire to hear people lie in Chinese, in Arabic, and in Hindustani, as I had heard them do in French, in order to assure myself that my country was neither in advance nor behind its contemporaries.

And it is at this moment that you choose to preach to me of love, the repose of the home, and that sweet confidence which charms away the hours !

My poor Jacques, you are a great child, and Mlle. d'Erlange, if she is not any worse than other women, which is by no means certain, at least is like them all, and that is enough to make me fly from her.

The proofs by which you wished to convince me that I am guilty of being in love, have afforded me much amusement.

"You are continually with her," you say to me ; "you talk with her, you look at her, you treat her as a blond fairy : confess that you are in love with her !"

Even if I wished to avoid her, have I the legs with which to do so? Do you wish me to talk to her with my head turned aside, and are you going to see in the pleasing fantasies of my first regaining consciousness anything but the usual exaggerations of travellers who relate their adventures?

And as for her being blond, my friend, I cannot help that, she is blond, and I have said it frankly without thinking any evil. . . . This brings me back to your complaints on the subject of Mlle. d'Erlange: "You force me to imagine what she is," you say to me; "but apart from her hair, do not give an indication of her personal appearance. And you dilate at length upon the tapestries, the crumbling towers, trifles indeed! I have the frame, I know it by heart. Put in the picture, I pray you!"

Here it is, and true with a truth that my eyes by no means prejudiced, as you see, can guarantee as absolute.

Mlle. Colette is rather small, or at least, without being so in reality, she appears so. This agrees with the extreme delicacy of her figure. Her head, like that of Greek statues, is small, or do the quickness and multiplicity of her movements give one that impression? I do not know. But it is certain that standing, in the rare moments of quiet, she is erect and straight as a tall birch tree, and I look at her then with surprise. How has she taken on this extra height?

Then, some idea enters her mind, she goes to the right or to the left with her gliding step, and she is nothing but an elf who has escaped from her home to pay us mortals a visit. But you well know that an elf has neither stature nor age.

Her nose is short, delicate, and a little saucy ; the oval of her face is pretty, clear as a beautiful fruit, and her complexion is like amber.

Do not read yellow, we are not at Camboge ; it is a transparent skin under which there always shines a ray of sunlight. Her forehead is broad, her mouth well made, and as for her eyes, I would willingly say they are superb, if you would take it as it is meant ; but you will see flames and bursts of passion, where there is only the description of a conscientious passport, for upon a passport itself they would be written, I answer for it, and pointed out to every one as "peculiar marks," they resemble so little those generally seen.

Large, superbly set, — I might as well tell you now, for to-morrow you would ask for it, I know you, — these eyes are of a deep black, intense, and from them leaps an incessant lightning.

The eyelid lowered, it is the calm of a sleeping child ; awake, it is flashing, and one is led to think that there is an internal light shining through this flaming iris.

Does the black diamond exist? I do not know, although it is often spoken of ; but I believe that I can picture it to myself easy enough now.

The distinctive feature of her appearance is a mobility of expression, of which nothing can give you the least idea, and a general vivacity. Literally, one can see the ideas running about in those great eyes which think so like an open book, and are rather traitorous.

The curling lashes rarely droop, and then with a slow movement like that of a bird's wing hovering in the air, for the light does not trouble them in the least: they and the sun are sworn comrades.

The eyebrows are straight and delicate, they are like the stroke of a pencil made with a firm hand.

Finally, to complete this mixture of grace and mischief, picture to yourself upon the left side, above the lip, a very little dimple coming from no one knows where, which shows itself in season and out of season, raising only one corner of the mouth, — as if she laughed only upon one side at a time, like one who is forbidden, — which gives her an expression of inexpressible cheerfulness.

I will not say that Mlle. Colette has the hands and feet of a child, for I think the comparison absurd. The idea! To finish the tall body of a young girl with two plump feet, as wide as long, and with those little fat paws full of dimples which young children have! It makes one shudder! But the *Erlanges* are evidently of good birth.

To sum up, it is an original face, remarkable in many respects; one which would fill you with admira-

tion, and to which you would dedicate a sonnet each evening ; a painter would be delighted with it, although it would be impossible for him to paint it just as it is.

I shall ask her permission to attempt it some day, however, and this first adventure of my journey shall have the first page in my sketch-book.

"Ah, well ! what then ?" you say. . . . Ah, well ! is one obliged to love everything that is beautiful ? I have described her to you like an artist, as I shall be describing to you in three months, palaces, lotus flowers, and Almas, — if, indeed, Almas exist anywhere but in the ballets at the theatres ; but if you are going to imagine a new romance with every new face that I present to you, I shall be forced to write in negro style : —

"Pleasant little trip. Just arrived. Made fine crossing. Me not sea-sick. Found nice cabin to live in. I kiss little white brother."

We must see the world as it is, my friend ; there is no one worth very much, you and I excepted, and we deserve something better than these pampered dolls we know so well, dreaming of fine carriages, of diamonds, and of toilettes. Therefore I took the vow of celibacy a long time ago in your name as well as in my own ; and we will suffice for each other. Sign the contract, and dream no longer.

As for your delicate counsels in regard to Mlle. Colette, be easy, moralist ; if I am made of bronze, she is of crystal ; and I do not think that my personal

appearance is such as to inflame any one at present. And besides, do you think that a creature who laughs all the day long can be very sentimental? She is not a woman, she is a bell always jingling, and to see her one would swear that the life we lead here is the most diverting in the world.

You know what it is in reality, however; and just now, while Mlle. d'Erlange was dancing about the room, unconsciously humming in the way so habitual to her, dusting the porcelains and the knick-knacks, I followed with my eyes the movement of her hands with much the same melancholy one feels in looking upon those condemned to death; and as I listened to her humming I could not keep myself from questioning her about it.

"*Mon Dieu!*" I exclaimed, "what makes you so gay, and wreathes your lips in smiles?"

"My good humor!" she replied; "does it tire you?"

"Not at all! You astonish me, that is all."

"It is certainly very unlike you!" she answered quickly. "And if it is allowable for me to question in my turn, what makes laughter such a stranger to you?"

"Suffering, just now," I replied at first, dryly, — then, as I was ashamed of this flagrant lie, and above all of the feeling of spite which aroused this rather unkind recollection of the past, I continued: "But generally, I suppose that it is a humor contrary to yours."

She raised her eyes, which had veiled themselves with a quick movement, and smiling again, she said: "Bad humor, then?"

"Well, yes, bad humor without doubt, at least in the opinion of those who regard laughter as the assured sign of an amiable nature, and not as a grimace or merely hereditary contortion confirming the assertions of those who declare that we are descended from monkeys."

"From monkeys!" She drew back with a gesture of dismay, embracing with a rapid glance her hands and her entire person. "I have never heard of that before! Is it indeed possible? Is it true, Monsieur? How have they found it out?" — Then, as she saw me shake my head: — "No? Oh! I am glad," she continued before I could say a word, "for it would be droll, but so disgusting. Imagine what one would feel in meeting a caged baboon and saying to one's self that it must be respected as an ancestor! It is, indeed, bad enough to think that one resembles them when laughing."

She ran to a glass, placed so high that she had to get upon a table in order to see herself, and looking at her deepening dimple, she said philosophically, "It is quite possible that this is only a grimace after all, but it is a good thing all the same."

And she burst into a most beautiful laugh, as a proof of what she said, leaping to the ground with a bound and with all the lightness and grace of a gazelle.

Her credulity, as you see, is like her gayety, the expression of a veritable child; and she gave herself up for a moment to her sudden access of joy; then as I remained serious, she sat down, grew calm and said very low:—

“Perhaps when one is much older, much wiser, one may care for it no longer; but I have not reached that point yet!”

How is that, Jacques? Does she take me for a patriarch, and have you noticed that I have become gray and bowed?

Well, this will quiet you and show you that there is no danger in my remaining here.

As for me, I see nothing in her but a foolish child, as I have told you; and as for her, she already considers me so old and respectable that a little more and she will confound me with her grandfather the baboon. So we are both well protected.

After this, brother Jacques, invent no more romances, and sleep without dreaming; my granddaughter and myself wish you good evening.

But watch yourself, my friend; you see what a traitor it is, this decrepitude: it will come upon you some fine morning before you are aware of it.

“You who are so old, . . . so old!”

They take the bandage from my forehead this evening. What appearance is my scar going to make? I think about it a little, I confess.

If the scar has an honorable look, I will get used

to it; but if it is a hole round and deep, like a blow from a stick or a pedestal, I will summon Mlle. Colette and her executioner to rip it open again!

Good heavens! we have our self-love however aged we may be!

XX.

APRIL 12.

I CANNOT say that my intimacy with M. de Civreuse progresses: it is the same to-day as it was yesterday. He is now just what he has been ever since he first regained consciousness: polite as a king, but rough as a bear, and a mocker besides: our most trifling conversations are disputes.

"Why are you always disagreeing with your Monsieur?" said Benoit to me yesterday; "it is not good for him, you know!"

"What can I do, nurse?" I replied; "he sees red where I see white." . . . Besides, I cannot allow him to say such atrocious things and always approve them just because he is sick, when he takes up so quickly everything that I do. The temptation to resent is too much for me!

It is true that I have preached to myself morning and evening, told myself that if I was different I should undoubtedly please him better, and vowed that I would change the next day; but as soon as I am with him, and hear the calm tone in which he so indifferently criticises both people and things, I start up in spite of myself and reply to him with all the intense indignation that I feel. Or again, when I am seated

by the fire, listening to the melting snow which falls with a great noise now that the eave-spouts are broken down, and in the place of my solitude of the past month see in the depths of the room that brown face and hear that sonorous voice which replies to me or questions me, while outside the April sun dances across the window-panes, I am taken with such bursts of joy, so quick and so unexpected, that I begin to laugh without any reason, and without being able to stop myself, I am so happy, so happy ! . . .

All this appears absurd to M. de Civreuse, and he takes upon himself the duty of trying to prove to me that it is nothing to be proud of, that all this gayety is only an hereditary trait and the result of education, and that we laugh as monkeys make grimaces, and for no other reason !

Does he say it mockingly, in order to frighten me, or because he believes it a little ? I can never disentangle more than half that he says to me, and were it ten times true, what could I do ? Must I deprive myself of laughter and running about on account of a chance resemblance, or possibly a natural one, and must I no longer break my nuts with my teeth, or leap over obstacles at a bound ? — things which show still more the relationship ! . . .

He is a pedant whom I will leave to his criticisms if he continues : for this is a characteristic which I did not take into consideration in that beautiful happy time when I was praying to my saint, and when we

came to an understanding as to what sort of a person my hero should be. But whoever he shall be he shall love Colette as she is, with her dog, with her faults, with her laughter, with her peculiar ideas, and with her girdle tied wrong side out, or she will return to her own affairs, and will continue to pull down the stars in her little corner, until she places her hand upon the right one, at any rate upon one which has not been soaked in a pail of water to extinguish all its light before coming to her.

The truth is that I am furious, furious not only because M. de Civreuse finds me not to his taste, that he thinks me ugly, foolish, and I do not know what besides; but furious above all that I have tried in vain, and cannot meet him with his own cold and indifferent politeness.

Sometimes I am tempted to retort and to tell him plainly that if his opinion of me is not flattering, mine certainly is not as it regards him; but I distrust my tongue. For at the bottom, I do not think so at all, and therefore it is quite possible that my diatribe would turn suddenly into a compliment! It is enough to make one tremble! His ear is so acute that I do not know if it would be possible for me to express what I feel, but do not really mean a word of, in such a way that he would not detect the difference.

Then I relapse into silence, and when alone in my room, with closed doors, I revenge myself by rudely questioning my imagination and my heart.

"What do you mean?" I say to them, in a point-blank manner, as in imagination I set them opposite to me. "Explain yourselves; whence comes this folly and this infatuation?"

"What has this man done to you? He is not amiable, he is scarcely polite, less beautiful than we are, assuredly, and it is clear that we hardly please him."

"What effort has he made to conceal it from you? For three weeks, has he attempted to say to you a single tender or gallant word, so much as a word of two syllables, or even to utter a sigh? Do either of you know more about this than I? Speak!"

Neither has much to say, but their short answer admits of no discussion:—"He pleases us, that is all."

And this is how I find myself thinking of M. de Civreuse a little, often, constantly indeed, without being at all satisfied with him, however, and without fully understanding what is really in my heart.

Sometimes I wonder, seeing the astonished air with which he follows my least word, if he has not been shut up like me in an old deserted and ruined château, where the moats and ramparts have kept him until now from the sight of all women, as my battlements have restrained me from contact with a living soul.

But in that case, a long time must have passed since he crossed his drawbridge, for his knowledge

of humanity, although it is not very amiable, appears to be quite extensive, and he knows much about many things of whose very names I am ignorant. Hence these peculiar conversations, when I reply to him without knowing exactly what I am saying, or when we quarrel without my knowing exactly why, and during which I am not sure that he always knows himself what he means.

Yesterday, for example, we were speaking of society people; I was saying to him how little I knew of things outside of Erlange, and begging him to relate to me what there is to be seen and what is being done outside of my hole.

He commenced immediately, but he described what I asked for in such a way, that I listened astonished to hear him treat all men indifferently as wretches or as rascals. . . . Was it a joke, or must one really believe him? If it was true, one would scarcely dare to put one foot before the other: here a trap, there a pit-fall, farther on a mine, which only waits for you to step on it to explode; this is, according to him, the ordinary condition of things, and all covered over with flowers, smiles, and honeyed words to lead you on.

Is it literally true? and does he speak of real mines filled with powder? I do not know; and after having attentively listened to him, I could not prevent myself from rebelling.

"But then," I cried, jumping up, "your world would be a den of robbers!"

To which he replied very quietly : —

“It resembles that very much indeed !”

And when I asked him, indignantly, if he was sure that what he told me was true, he said : —

“*Mon Dieu !* I speak as a traveller who describes the cross-road where thieves have taken from him his watch and his purse ; that is all !”

Have they truly robbed him ? I could not help but ask him that, and without moving an eyebrow he said dryly : —

“Of my good faith and my confidence, yes, Mademoiselle. Does not one find these worth as much as doubloons and a valise ?”

This is my guest, and these are his peculiarities. In these instances what could I reply ? I remained stupefied, and I could quite as easily have followed his conversation if he had seen fit to talk in Chinese.

To sum up, he appears to me to be little subject to illusions, and as for eighteen years I have filled my brain with ideals and chimeras, I think that now I have found a check for them.

There is not even an exception : we are not worth any more than the others ; for when I ventured to put in a little word in behalf of women : —

“Pooh !” said he, “each has his instincts. Wolves bite, tigers tear with their claws ! Do you think that one is much better than the other ?”

Truly, I do not believe that any one ever treated men and women before in this cynical way, the good

God himself who knows the secrets of all hearts would not, I am sure.

I was determined to stop him, to embarrass him at least, and so planting myself before him, I said: —

“And I, whom you do not know, what am I then?”

“Well,” said he, smiling, “of buds not yet in bloom I would not say too much, but I believe indeed that all the instincts are there!”

Really, I could have struck him. Therefore, by way of argument, I said: —

“And Monsieur Jacques?”

“Jacques?” Then changing his tone upon the instant. . . . “Jacques — There are all the treasures, all the delicacies, all the kindnesses, all the heroisms of the earth united in one man!”

And as he took breath: —

“Then he is an exception,” I said ironically.

“Precisely, the exception which proves the rule.”

“What does that mean?”

“Oh! *mon Dieu*, not much in truth! Merely a repetition. It is a current phrase.”

“Ah, well!” I exclaimed angrily, “then one should catch it sometime and put it in a cage, since it has no sense.”

I had uttered an absurdity, I knew it well; but I was vexed without knowing why.

M. de Civreuse laughed but did not reply, and took up his panegyric on his friend from the point

where he had left off. He was another man now, he spoke rapidly; assuredly he had put aside his reserve, and for the first time I saw him animated.

And this Jacques is kind and good and beautiful! Truly, I shall end by becoming interested in him: it seemed to me that he was describing one of those fairy kingdoms where all is perfect, streams of barley syrup, rocks of candied sugar, and a little rain vanilla-perfumed for the warm days! Therefore, when M. Pierre let himself fall back upon his pillows with a satisfied air:—

“Ah, well!” I said with conviction, “I know that I should like him very much!”

Upon that he turned quickly around, knitting his terrible brow, and looking into my two eyes:—

“Believe me, Mademoiselle,” said he, in his most biting tone, “that he would be proud and happy!”

And I, not reflecting a second, replied in my turn, not less quickly: “*Mon Dieu!* I believe it; but not every one who wishes it is liked, Monsieur!”

After that, a silence heavy and crushing.

Is there in truth anything more singular than this character, and can this conversation be explained? These are, however, the ordinary talks between us, and three times out of four, without my being able to understand how, they end in disputes.

This time, however, could I have done any better? After having borne very patiently with his chivalrous classification, which placed me among the wolves, if

I was not reckoned among the tigers. I fell into agreement with him in his eulogy on his friend, and beheld him suddenly angered! Turned towards the wall, with an air as foreign to all that surrounded him as if he had fallen from the moon, M. de Civreuse began to whistle quickly a little march, accompanying himself with a lively movement of his fingers upon the coverlet.

I soon grew tired of this silence, and moved about seeking some new subject, biting my nails one after the other. But that made less noise than the little march, and in spite of myself I followed its movement, the bounding rhythm of which made me beat time without wishing to—"La, . . . la, . . . la, la, la, la!" It was impossible to endure this, and besides, I felt myself in the humor for nonsense. At the third repetition I will speak, I said to myself. And as the third came before I had found a single idea, I gave the table a sly kick with my foot, and everything upon it fell with a frightful noise. But I had not reckoned upon the coolness of M. Pierre: he quietly finished his tune without turning around, and as I murmured a little confusedly:—

"It is the table, my foot caught in it."

"Ah!" was all he said.

I set about repairing the disaster. The contents of a cup had been spilled in the crash.

"Lap it up, my good dog!" said I to "Un," showing him the liquid.

Suddenly M. de Civreuse stopped, and looking at it, said tranquilly:—

“It is the cup which had the morphine in it; he will sleep until to-morrow.”—And he started to go on with his march.

But this I would not allow; I replied that he was mistaken. The contradiction stopped him on the spot; he turned his head to prove to me that I was wrong, and in a minute we were at it again.

This is a specimen of our relations to each other. Certainly the flower of gallantry is absent, and yet I find an extreme pleasure in it. So much the more in that nothing angers me, nothing wounds me, and my perpetual bursts of rage cool so quickly, that in the evening when I have returned to my own room, and shake out the cinders of this fire to search for a half-extinguished spark of rancor, all my recollections of the day leap forth like veritable fireworks, and it is only the rockets of joy and pleasure that flash before my mental vision.

I know very well that I gain nothing; but in the future, in the far hazy distance, I picture to myself the revenge I shall have, and I smile to myself in advance at the thought of it.

Oh! M. de Civreuse, on the day when you will fall at my feet, what pleasure it will give me to leave you there, and how you will regret then the time that you have lost, while you anxiously look for those smiles which you could so easily have won for yourself during these hours!

Often he makes me speak of my life at Erlange, of my convent, and of my aunt. Yesterday I believe he was even going to ask me some questions on my studies. A little examination in history and geography, in which assuredly I should not have distinguished myself!

In my turn, I have questioned him upon his journey. What beautiful things he will do and see! To go wherever his fancy leads him; to take the advice of no one; to hunt elephants as one catches sparrows here with birdlime; to climb mountains on whose summits the head is above the clouds and the feet within them; to row upon the Ganges, a great sacred river — as we would say here, “a river of holy water,” — where there are sometimes encounters with crocodiles as long as boats, and sometimes dead Indians come floating down the stream on their way to Paradise, — for that is the road, it appears, and that is the system of their burials there! — To take the air in a palanquin, and find each morning in the oysters for breakfast pearls enough to make a necklace, what a dream, what a life!

A great cry rose within me while listening to him, a mute cry indeed: “Oh! take me! take me! as a domestic, as a page, as a cook, or as a comrade, according to your wish! I will be so agreeable, so brave, so bold, so hardened to fatigue, so happy to sup off a roasted jackal!” But how should I express these longings?

He, seeing me hanging upon his words, with eyes shining with enthusiasm and hands tightly clasped in my emotion:—

“All that appears to you superb, does it not?” said he, with the air he usually takes when he finds me carried away with excitement. . . .

Truly, to look at him, to hear him, one would think that he had already lived two or three lives at least, and that his fourth attempt bored him, like an old book that one knows by heart. At such a page, he says to himself, I shall find this, at such another, that, and his indifference to everything comes from this cause; he has no longer any pleasure in the unexpected. This is the only thing that can explain his moroseness, and sometimes I long to ask him:—“Did you do this, or did you think that in your former life?” But he would believe me insane without doubt; therefore, I wisely keep my little observations to myself, and merely tell him in all sincerity how much I envy him, and how this life of adventure entices me!

“Bah! you would soon be tired of it,” he said to me, shrugging his shoulders: “there is neither a doll nor a rattle there!”

I tired of it, I! But I should find it adorable, I know, and moreover, do I have rattles here? If M. de Civreuse would kindly show them to me, he would oblige me.

I who have always loved the impossible, who, in my cradle, longed for the golden arrow that held

back my curtains, because I believed it inaccessible, and who since that time have continued to wish in the same manner for all the golden arrows that were placed too high for me !

“ But you do not know what I like, you see ! ” I said to M. Pierre ; “ I desire all that I cannot reach, and I admire all that I cannot do ! ”

“ Like the Malays of Timor, ” he replied, looking at me with curiosity, “ who adore the crocodiles, because, they say very judiciously : ‘ A crocodile can swallow a man, but a man cannot swallow a crocodile. ’ ”

I made no reply, but the reasoning does not appear to me to be so foolish, and these Malays seem to me to be quite logical.

If one does not like a thing from preference, it is something to worship it through fear ; and if I knew the way to make some one say he adored me, even from the fear of being devoured, how willingly would I become a Malay ! . . .

PIERRE TO JACQUES.

My friend, she has wit, it cannot be denied, but her inflammability and her ardor frighten me.

Would you like to see a rocket which, instead of going into the clouds, danced perpetually before your eyes ? It makes me nervous and I wink. But one must be just : the rocket has beautiful colors and a strong light.

This is to tell you that we have daily conversations,

and that she no longer restrains herself before me. A patriarch is of no consequence, you readily understand !

But to commence with my somewhat tender sensibilities, if you are willing. Things promise better than I expected. The scar descends from my hair and cuts through one eyebrow in a decided way. I have no fault to find with that, and with it I could return from a "Malakoff Tower," if I wished, without shame : it is irreproachable.

The good doctor himself contemplated it proudly. The vanity of the artist is indeed excusable ! Then he invited all of my attendants to come and see the model of his professional skill.

Benoite has complimented me after her own way with her habitual naïvete : — "It looked better before, certainly, but for a patch, it is a good patch !" And Mlle. Colette almost did me the honor of showing a weakness !

She bent over me to look at it, whiter than her linen handkerchief, and as I raised my eyebrows to show her its flexibility : —

"It moves !" she cried with alarm, turning towards the doctor.

"What does?" said he to her; "the skin on the forehead? I should hope so, indeed, and so does yours."

She frowned and moved her own in every way to assure herself; then, quieted, she approached, and

comparing my two eyes, the one just uncovered with the other:—

“They are just alike!” she breathed in a low voice.

And I must conclude from that, that up to this time she has supposed me to be blind or cross-eyed.

The excitement quieted down and the doctor departed. Benoite returned to her oven, an extravagant appellation, for they still cook at Erlange upon the hearth and with the tripods of our ancestors, and Mademoiselle Colette and myself were left to our customary tête-à-tête.

You would not be able to believe all that we have said here for some days, and my discoveries about my young companion multiply.

First, Jacques, veil your face; but I must come to this conclusion, that she is absolutely ignorant. A veritable little carp. Only you would lose time if you attempted to pity her, and your sympathy would be badly placed, for she bears this deficiency with the most amiable philosophy, and she has made a little salad of all the knowledge she possesses, and that appears to satisfy her perfectly.

She has passed, however, two years in one of the best convents in Paris: but we are great ignoramuses, you and I, if we imagine it is work that occupies them there.

From class to class the interests vary. From dolls

they pass to hoops, from hoops to story-books, from story-books to worldliness, to the polka step and the forbidden sketch of a waltz taught upon the close-cut grass near the hedges. Studies there are only accessories, a side issue, a fifth wheel to a carriage.

Moreover, Mlle. d'Erlange has her own ideas about things, and she has given them to me with extreme clearness. For her part, she has never been able to retain anything but what treated of people or things that she liked. But all these she knows to perfection. As for the rest : Nothing ! That is her system.

Thus her history of France is very simple. She takes to Charlemagne, a great man who interests her, and she knows very well all there is about him : the ball which he holds in his hand, his sword, his large foot, and above all, his nephew Roland ! From him she jumps to Henry IV, her supreme delight. She remembers all his witty sayings, adores his profile and his fury, but gets somewhat confused in the history of his abjuration and conquest. Since he had France in his cradle when he was born, why did he go to war on her account ? Then Napoleon is her final point and her last enthusiasm. Since then, are we sleeping, or do we still live ? This is what she does not know, and until the next great man appears she is resolved not to trouble herself about it ! Consequently the poor child runs the risk of having nothing to do for some time, if I can believe the signs of the present times ; how does it seem to you ?

Meantime, she mentions confusedly, Bayard, Duguesclin, Jeanne d'Arc, and in general every warrior. These serve as commas in the immense interregnum, and I am not sure that she does not crown them at one time or another.

You see the process, there is nothing easier, — she does not confine herself to theories, but applies her way of reasoning resolutely to everything ; therefore in geography, her international antipathies are numerous, and she expresses them freely.

For example, England and the English displease her ! Upon her map the British Channel has a red mark through it which Mlle. d'Erlange never crosses over. You may judge if the Rhine fares any better. The Italians are no more agreeable to her than the English ; therefore the same fatal line undulates to the summit of the Alps. On the other hand, she even goes as far as Russia to interest herself in her friends the Slavs : and I believe that she has an idea of more than one peculiarity in her own land.

Tell her that the Parnassus is a hill facing Montmartre, and you will not astonish her at all ; and she mixes up the departments, the towns, the railroads, and the rivers with the most amusing indifference.

Add to this some fragments of varied knowledge which she has picked up no one knows where, some verses gathered into a lump, some political ideas, some anecdotes of the time of King William, a way

of doing sums for which the humblest cobbler's apprentice would be turned off, the possession of a marvellous self-assurance, and an extreme quickness of comprehension, and you will have an idea of a combination which would give the jaundice to a pedagogue, but would fill a fanciful person with delight.

For myself, who am neither the one nor the other, I contemplate it, I enjoy it, I comfortably seat myself in my piazza chair, without forgetting to give you the other end of the telephone, lucky rascal that you are !

Hesitating at nothing, moreover, and delighting in the impossible, if I should propose to her a journey to the Indies in my service to-morrow, I would bet ten to one that she would accept — and this is said without the least regard to myself, for that I should hold no place in her thought is positively certain.

But to see the crocodiles, the rattlesnakes, and such pretty things ! Can you imagine the pleasure of it ? She would make the journey if she had to swim all the way out for it !

It is incredible that you find among all women the development of the same emotions and the same love of adventure which they place higher than any other enjoyment, and yet which would make them die of mortal fright if they were realized.

Put Mlle. Colette face to face with the jaws of an alligator who looked at her while yawning, and the poor little thing would fly, unless her legs refused to

do her service, screaming at the top of her voice. And yet at this present time she cannot imagine any happiness comparable to that of seeing herself near these great lizards that sob during the evening with the plaintive cries of children in their cradles, according to what she has been told, but who at other times swallow their man, showing that they are children who have at least cut their second teeth.

I have attempted to disenchant her; but she is determined to find everything beautiful, and there is so much blue upon her palette that I despair of ever putting upon it a darker color. You cry out with indignation at the idea of disillusioning this dreamer! Ah! why do you not wish me to teach this girl that water wets and fire burns? She is capable of not suspecting them, and of putting out her hand to try them. Comfort yourself, however; she loses neither food nor drink in following my sceptical preaching, and I wish that you could see her take her lunch; it is a comforting sight.

At four, just as soon as the first stroke of the clock is heard,—a worthless old thing, which goes according to its own will, with the greatest scorn of exactitude, and which Mlle. Colette herself winds up every fortnight, in the top of the château,—she springs up and disappears without the slightest warning, even if she is in the middle of a sentence, or has to leave a gesture unfinished, and is soon lost in the depth of her ruin, as if like the shipwrecked passengers of

"la Méduse" she felt the positive necessity of going in search of food.

Five minutes before, she was not thinking of it; but at four o'clock, it is as if she felt a faintness, an uncontrollable appetite, and if the hand should pass the quarter all would be lost.

At first, I await her return, surprised, anxious, and always thinking that something unusual has occurred to produce this sudden flight; but at the end of five minutes she returns with a light step, a part of her dress raised in order to carry her provisions, and seats herself again in her chair, and while eating her repast she takes up the conversation at the place where she left it off; and what a repast it is !

Regularly, I say it to her praise, she offers to share it with me, but she comes so bravely to the end of it alone that I should scruple to touch it, and I watch her break her nuts with the pressure of her teeth like a Nuremberg plaything, eat her dried prunes, which resemble melted rubber, or a kind of sweetmeats of a soft paste, which she draws out in great white strings.

Once only have I accepted her courtesy. From the folds of her gown, besides an enormous piece of bread, she had taken out successively five red apples. Five apples ! can you understand these young girls' stomachs incapable of finishing a good bloody beefsteak, but which make away with five apples in a few minutes?

At her first offer, I had refused, and without insist-

ing further, she had set herself to work. Conscientiously, with the wool of her gown, she made each apple shine before eating it, rubbing it, and re-rubbing it, and not putting it between her teeth until her great, black eyes were reflected in this singular mirror. I followed her, amused by her proceedings, interesting myself in the spots which resisted, and so occupied with her that, at the third apple, she noticed my attention. Was there in my glance a glimpse of covetousness, or did she only think so? I do not know, but suddenly holding out her hand:—

“I have five of them to-day; truly you can have one of them,” she said, with gravity. And as I answered nothing, overcome by this munificence:—

“I am going to make it shine for you,” said she. And still with the same fold of her draperies, with an ardor which sent the blood to her cheeks, she brought the apple up to the desired point, then handed it to me. I ate it, as you may believe, with a gratitude proportionate to the kindness; but this symbolical fruit worried me, and with an anxious eye I sought the serpent under the furniture. He was not there, fortunately, . . . at least, apparently not!

This brings to my mind a physiological appreciation of Mlle. Colette, which will amuse you I am very sure, and will complete her scientific knowledge.

It was yesterday, at the particular hour of which I have spoken. At the stroke of four she had departed, and the quarter had struck before she re-

appeared. Look at this anomaly: Fifteen minutes to prepare her feast! What was she going to bring back? Just heaven! My eyes did not leave the door. Five minutes later she appeared, both hands full, and with a sedate air as if she was bringing in a relic. For an instant I had the idea that she had brought back her St. Joseph with her, and that peace had been made between them; but no, it was not that! The object of so much care was a piece of hot bread smoking between her fingers, — a cantle, as one would say here, — in size, nearly a quarter of a loaf, in the midst of which a hole was made, filled with thick and yellow cream, melting and giving forth the most pleasing odor.

She uttered a sigh of relief while seating herself, nodding her head with a trustful air and showing me the object while saying in a low voice and with an expressive grimace: —

“It is hot!” Then incontinently, she attacked the fabulous treat, biting and blowing it in turn.

“But,” I could not help saying, “you are not going to eat that?”

“Certainly, why not? It is excellent!”

“Perhaps, but it is as heavy as lead! You will have a stomach ache!”

“The stomach,” she replied with an air of superiority, “what do you think that this can do to it?” And she laughed with delight at the idea that this half pound of warm dough could inconvenience her stomach!

"*Mon Dieu!* it can give it some trouble to digest it," I replied. Then, as she opened her eyes wide, the thought came to me that she did not know in the least what I was talking about, and calling to my aid the classical description of my childhood :—

"The stomach," I said in a learned tone, "is a sort of pocket which is shaped like a bagpipe. Its inflated extremity is placed on the left side, and above the" . . .

"Oh, well!" said she, unceremoniously interrupting me, "it is not at all like that, that I look at it!"

And as the bread was decidedly too warm, she laid it down upon her knees, and without being urged :—

"Here," she replied, "is the way I represent it. I see an old gentleman, very small, very bent, in nut-colored clothes, with a powdered wig and a gold-headed cane, who goes backward and forward continually in a little room. In the middle there is a great fireplace through which tumbles all that one sends to him, and towards which he hurries as soon as a cargo arrives. He stoops down, sorts it out, looks at it, and rubs his hands when what he receives seems good to him, shrugs his shoulders, and becomes angry when it seems bad. 'The simpletons, the imbeciles, what have they sent me here?' he murmurs. 'What do they expect that I can do with it?' And he pushes it all with his foot into one corner where one puts things that are good-for-nothing, and where perhaps my warm bread will go, but that is all the

harm it will do. As for the pocket and the bagpipes, I have never heard anything about them, and I do not wish to trouble myself with them. My little old man suffices for the work, we intend to enjoy ourselves, and if he knits his brows a little in the days of green fruits, he has had the politeness never to say anything to me about it; so why should I change?"

The bread no longer smoked, the crust cracked open as it cooled, and the cream smelt better than ever: Mlle. Colette took it up again delicately with the ends of her fingers and finished eating it without another word, persuaded that she had convinced me of the existence of her little man. There is her logic.

After all, after hearing her relate her life, her originalities are explained. I questioned her yesterday upon her childhood, seeking in her past some trace of a governess, a professor, or some direction of some kind, and as I could find nothing that resembled it:—

"Who did bring you up then?" I asked at last.

"Me? why, no one!" she replied. "I have grown up just in my own way. Thank God! it was the compensation of my solitude."

And she made a little gesture with her hand to indicate how any one grows up according to his own will.

How is that for an education? This little girl growing up like the wild oats, between her dog and her

old nurse, more of a slave still than her dog, and with twenty-four hours each day in which to do all sorts of foolish actions to her satisfaction ! I understand now the act which procured for me the enviable advantage of her acquaintance. There is no previous consideration in what she does, she has no thought of the action beyond the necessary time to accomplish it, — she knows of no other obstacle.

There were, however, some melancholy hours in her existence, which she related to me without reserve. The aunt — who, you must know, is a frightful old woman — has just given me a glimpse of her humor, and on account of a sally which she has just made upon us, our whole little society was thrown into agitation, and the trace of it still remains.

It was about two hours ago, I was looking at “Un” whom Mlle. Colette was making execute the most varied tricks in his repertoire, not disdaining to take part herself from time to time in the exercises, when the door opened quickly, and a woman entered. Tall, dry, bony, of an ugliness which would have discredited “Croquemitaine,” if she had ever put herself into opposition with him to make the comparison : she announced herself in a voice which instantly brought her young niece to her feet, and which made the dog leap before his mistress as if to guard her, showing all his teeth.

“Monsieur, I am Mlle. d'Épine !” said she to me.

“Very well named,” thought I to myself ; then

aloud — “Mademoiselle, I have the honor of presenting to you my respect!” I replied.

But she did not trouble herself about my respect!

“A month ago,” she continued, “you arrived at my house, falling from no one knows where, and as I thought that you are now at the end of your sojourn, I wished to see you once before your departure.”

“Arrived” seemed to me strong, “sojourn” still stronger, and you will admit that there could be no clearer way of showing me the door, but before I could answer a word, Mlle. d’Erlange had started up:—

“Say at our house!” she cried, “and, indeed, at my house, for M. de Civreuse is in my wing, you know it well! and as to the manner in which he has ‘fallen’ here, as you seem to have forgotten it, I will bring it back to your memory.

“I wounded Monsieur in the head by throwing something out-doors just as he was passing on the road, without a thought of us, I assure you! and Benoit and I brought him into the kitchen half dead. Then, while she was preparing the room, and as I was keeping watch over him downstairs, I vowed, kneeling beside him, to watch over him, to cure him, and finally to obtain my pardon.

“Do you remember it now, aunt, and all these things which I have told you once already?”

“I remember only this,” she cried with fury, walk-

ing towards the young girl: "once already, indeed, have I opposed this rôle of nurse that you are filling here under such highly improper circumstances, and this time I shall know how to make you leave it!"

"Why have you not taken it upon yourself then?" replied Mlle. Colette. "There is more than one place beside this bed, I think!"

"A bed that I would have left before this evening, be assured of it, Mademoiselle!" cried I in my turn, "and which I would never have consented to occupy a single instant, had I been *more* than half dead, if I had had a suspicion that I was received against the will of any one here!"

I was beside myself. Insolent words burned upon my lips, and I do not know in truth what held me back from uttering them at that moment.

She did not answer a single word to my protestation, however, and turning towards her niece, she said:—

"You shall be forced to obedience by one wiser than yourself!"

Then judging that her work was accomplished, she went towards the door with her great swinging step, like a dismantled frigate which is being drawn upon the sands, its useless hulk bumping upon every rock.

But she was not half-way across the room when a fourth person appeared upon the scene, — it was my doctor who came in like an arrow, with frowning

brows and contracted lips, and who took her by the arm and stopped her without ceremony.

"Who speaks of obedience in the chamber of a sick man, when the doctor is not present?" said he, rudely.

He had listened behind the door and did not conceal it.

"You," continued he, turning towards Mlle. Colette, "you are in your place here. Do not stir. I am the one who has placed you here; I am the one who keeps you here; I take it upon my shoulders!

"You, Monsieur," said he to me, "you have not forgotten our first conversation, I think; you know how I understand responsibility!

"I have your word and you will not leave Erlange until I myself release you.

"And you, Mademoiselle," added he, looking at the old maid whom he had not released, "I am going to have the honor of offering you my arm to conduct you to your room, and I will relate to you on the way some particulars about fractures, of the effects of which you seem to be ignorant, and which I am very sure will interest you."

And drawing away the abashed Mlle. d'Épine, upon whom he smiled pleasantly, he made her cross the entire room. Upon the threshold he stopped:—

"And note," added he, turning and looking at us, "that Mlle. d'Erlange was half mistaken just now. It is not one wing that belongs to her, it is the entire château, ruins and all!" — Then they went out!

To say that I was raging internally would be weak : my hand was sketching vague windmills, and I was eager to lay the blame upon some one. But, however bearded my adversary might be, the sex to which she laid claim placed her beyond attack, and yet I have seen grenadiers who would have passed for dandies in comparison with her breadth of shoulders ! Besides, the thought of Mlle. Colette came back to me, the tirade had been yet more rude to her.

I turned towards her, expecting to find her in tears, but she was far from it : with flashing eyes and head held proudly erect, she seemed like a Bellona in her wrath.

“The wicked woman ! the wicked woman !” cried she, stamping.

Then impetuously throwing herself into a chair : —

“For eighteen years have I lived near her !” she said with a burst.

“Why, is she always like this ?” I asked.

“Always !”

“But what is the matter with her ?”

“How can one tell ?” she replied, shaking her head. “Verjuice in the blood, perhaps !”

I suppose there are some women who grow bad dispositions just as some herbs grow nettles. She is among the nettles, evidently.

“And apart from my presence here, what is there usually which can enrage her against you ?”

She made no reply, looking at me with an unde-

cided air, with the shadow of a smile which raised one corner of her mouth, and began to draw out mechanically the long hair of her dog. I watched her, waiting for her to speak, and I felt so struck by the contrast between this charming face and the hard and broad visage of the great woman who had just gone out, that I exclaimed without reflecting: —

“Is it then because you are eighteen years old, and that she . . .?”

The smile became more pronounced, and Mlle. d'Erlange looked at me through her lashes, saying: —

“*Mon Dieu!* she was once of that age, but yet” . . . She became silent again, her eyelids were completely lowered now, and her lashes commenced to beat upon her rosy cheeks like a silken fan. Embarrassment is rare with her, but it is very becoming, and without hesitation I gave vent to my thoughts.

“She has been of that age indeed, that is evident; but her spring-time has not had the beauty of yours: that is it!”

How I allowed myself to utter this madrigal, I cannot tell! but Mlle. Colette had just defended me so bravely, that she deserved that I should come to her rescue in my turn. She, however, took this as the simple enunciation of a fact, began to laugh frankly, and raised her eyes with a little gesture which signified: “It is that; this time, you are right!” Then without transition and entirely at her ease, she allowed the flood of her recollections to flow, relating

to me those episodes of her childhood which were connected with her aunt, as well as her fright as a little girl before her, all without acrimony, but with a comical and mischievous sprightliness which gave a living touch, and a burlesque relief to the portrait of this peculiar guardian. "Egotism and jealousy!" two things most characteristic of the animal sum up this woman, and I am going to give you a trait which describes her.

A gourmand by nature, she arranges that the rather limited resources of the household may never deviate from the ordinary course of others, but the menu always carefully prepared is never more delicate than on fast days. On these mornings they cook some little choice dish, and on sitting down to the table Mlle. d'Épine says to her niece: —

"My stomach is not strong enough to endure fasting, Colette; you will abstain for both of us."

And the niece eats her sardines or her vegetables amidst the odor of her aunt's doves, who piously offers this compromise to heaven, praying it to accept the substitution.

I hope sincerely that this act may prepare for her a day in purgatory, and that she may then perceive that her hopes were not well founded; but purgatory is far away, and until that time comes who will draw this girl from between her claws, and above all, who will atone to her for the past, for the lack of affectionate care and education?

I tell you, Jacques, it is an imprisonment that is going on here, and that is precisely what the aunt wishes.

It is but a secondary matter that she refuses the roasted chickens to her niece, and that she takes the softest coverlets and the feather beds to sleep upon herself, and that all her care is for herself alone, but she intends to make this young mind a perfect blank, and to imprison her so closely within these four walls that no one will ever suspect that there is one who laughs in these ruins.

What would you call this crime, if you deny that it is an imprisonment, and how would you punish it?

For myself, I intend to defeat it and without delay; and the day after I leave here, I shall at once enter upon the work! Even if I must notify the press, assemble a family council, or call in the aid of the police. I will bring it about in some way, and the door of this cave shall be thrown down. . . . To whom should the rôle of righting the wrong belong, if not to those who scorn the world and who know it as it is!

In exchange for the watchfulness and care which she has bestowed upon me, Mlle. Colette shall have her liberty, and I am the one who will open her cage for her! *Vive Dieu!* Jacques, you hear me, and I swear it!

A half hour later the doctor returned, and here is the discussion which followed:—

"Doctor, I wish to go away!"

"Monsieur, let us not bring up that matter again. I beg you!"

"Give me back my promise!"

"Never, while I live; you are at the most delicate and critical point; do not spoil a beautiful fracture for me."

"It is impossible for me to remain here after the scene that has just taken place, you know it well!"

"Nonsense, I tell you that the woman is mad! Must I sign a certificate for Charenton for her, to put your mind at rest?"

And as I insisted: —

"Monsieur," said he, dryly, I am old enough and of enough strength of character to take upon myself the responsibility of my actions; and I desire you to send to me all those who are disposed to find fault with my doings." And he turned his back upon me, while Mlle. Colette continued to exclaim: —

"But since you are at my house! But since you have been told that you are at my house!"

The poor little one did not see very far.

Finally the doctor has promised, upon his honor, to set me free at the end of ten days; and I have promised in return not to attempt any escape until that time. But to sum up all, I am furious. I have tried in vain, the position is a false one. At every noise at the door I tremble like a schoolboy who has broken a rule, and willingly would I dismiss

Mlle. d'Erlange from her attendance upon me, only she does not put any evil construction upon it ; it was a scene, that is all ; she has witnessed many others, and she continues her ordinary manner of life, without any concern.

XXI.

APRIL 20.

It is finished, all the beautiful days are going and in spite of all that I can do, without knowing why or how, all my reveries end in tears !

It is without wishing it and even without perceiving it. I seat myself upon my divan as formerly, I think of the same things still : but what gave me pleasure yesterday, what made me laugh so gayly while I buried my head in the cushions that no one might hear me, makes me sad to-day. I bury my face still in the same place, but when I raise my head the silk is wet, and it is only then that I perceive that I am crying.

What a frightful scene my aunt made, and how oppressed with grief my heart has been ! I was so afraid that M. Pierre would be angry !

The doctor, happily, has smoothed it all over ; but there remains a little constraint, a little annoyance : it may be that he bears a grudge against us in spite of everything, and this thought gives me such pain !

He will pass only one week more here ! *Mon Dieu !* I would never have believed that he would have been so quickly cured ; it is too short ! That is to say, the sickness is not too short, but the sojourn ! I thought that he would remain still longer at Er-

lange, and above all, . . . Indeed, I did not think that it would end so. . . . Now, all is over; nobody cares for Colette; once gone, he will think of her no longer, and she will remain all alone, much more alone than ever now, for it is darker in a place where light has once shone, when the source of light has been taken away.

I am nearly discouraged, still this tenacious folly, which I have in my heart, hopes on. For what, and why? It cannot say; but it constantly repeats to me that it sees its revenge yonder. . . . I am afraid that it is indeed yonder!

At least M. de Civreuse shall suspect nothing; when near him I am gayer than ever, and moreover without effort. It is so nice in this great room! I tell all only to my confidants, — my cushion and my note-book: and when I have finished with the first, I carry it to the fireplace, I lay it up to dry, and I take the second. . . . The margins are unrecognizable; without thinking, I write two initials there, always the same ones, long, broad, interlaced, separated, and now upon my left hand I have put his entire name: one letter upon each nail and two upon the last, the thumb nail.

It was droll, and at first I laughed: then this beast of a little tear, which always comes without warning, fell, and the ink spread, and so it was all blotted out!

But yesterday I chose my ground better; I ran into the depths of the park, and upon the bark of a



"I ENGRAVED WITH MY LITTLE DAGGER THE NAME WHICH
OCCUPIES MY HEART."



great fir-tree, the one near which I have often dreamed and up which I climbed last autumn, in order to see adventures coming, I engraved with my little dagger the name which occupies my heart. There is no other way of relating to a tree what one thinks, and I was very glad to have it know.

When I returned, M. Pierre remarked my moist gown and wet boots.

"You have been out?" he asked me.

And I replied:—

"Yes, I have just taken a run!"

If he knew for what! . . .

PIERRE TO JACQUES.

"My friend, you are crazy!" . . .

Why does the beginning of that letter, which Henry IV wrote more than three hundred years ago to his faithful Sully, come back to my mind to-day? By analogy, without doubt, and because that upon this point at least, you resemble to-day that pearl of ministers.

Seriously, Jacques, your letter this time has made me angry! *Corbleu!* I am old enough to reason, I think, I know what I feel, and what I want, and your pleasantries have not an atom of common-sense.

My pulse is excellent, my head free, and my heart cool, whatever you may say; and there is no concealed object in view in the campaign which I meditate for the welfare of my youthful hostess.

“To mix yourself up in things which do not concern you,” you say to me. “To draw down upon yourself a crowd of annoyances and to cause yourself to be shown your place by the notary of the village, who will politely send you about your business — all that, for a person who is totally indifferent to you; how is it probable, and how can you think that it is possible for me to believe it? Above all, when I know that the person in question is a young and pretty creature! Pshaw! confess it, and marry her, it is the simplest way!”

My poor Jacques, you solve things with blows from a stick, as one breaks nuts. Your “simplest way” is actually heroic, and besides, you do not understand the case.

I do not work for reward, my friend; I do it for honor, for love of art, like an ancient knight, and you must confess, that if all those brave paladins, who formerly defended “the widow and the orphan,” had been forced, or indeed, authorized to marry all the prisoners they delivered in a year, each one of them would have possessed a veritable harem, and morality would have blotted out the institution in less than six months!

Consider that I am just commencing my tour of the world, and do not make my sword into a piece of furniture after my first affair; it dances in its scabbard with joy at the idea of all the pleasing things it can yet accomplish, and to hang it up in domestic

peace would appear horrible to it ! Moreover, if she seems to you such an inestimable prize, this blonde, why do you not come to her, and sue for her favor yourself ?

In confidence, if you wish to know all, Mlle. Colette likes you already ! She feels it, she has told me so, and were it not for fear of your usually impulsive actions, I should have spoken to you before of these friendly feelings. Now you know all about it, make haste, and I will present you !

From henceforth let us leave this subject, I pray you, for it irritates me. There is not even one more week remaining for me to pass here ; do not make me lie to this excellent doctor, and fly some fine evening from this tiresome struggle : and if you are not seeking a quarrel, for mercy's sake ! leave me in peace and pursue me no longer with your sentimental previsions !

I do not deny that an imagination still enthusiastic, a heart still susceptible, and a mind in which illusions were still fresh, would be affected here. These strange surroundings, this intimacy, these beautiful eyes !

But I am no longer twenty years old : it is not my fault, Jacques : it will be nine years to-morrow since I left that period, and there are two things which one never finds again : youth and illusions. If you can give them back to me, by the faith of the disenchanted, I will fall at your feet.

Our last days are passing pleasantly; Mlle. d'Erlange is gayer than ever, and no constraint is possible near her.

Between you and me, I confess that this careless spirit and this hilarity surprise me a little.

Mon Dieu! I am neither a coxcomb nor a lady-killer, but I appreciate myself at my just price, and I am worthy of an emotion perhaps; I can recall a golden youth when I held my place honorably. Without doubt they are less exacting at Paris than at Erlange.

Take note, that I am charmed that this is so; the contrary would have annoyed me, saddened me, burdened me with remorse, and I only speak of it to you as a somewhat singular fact. For you will agree that it *is* singular that a young girl who is alone, who is bored, and who suddenly sees her first romance come to her in the shape of a man, young and passable, should receive it thus; we can put into the basket with so many others the legend that declares that the hearts of young girls are so inflammable. For the rest, I would willingly believe that this exuberance which distinguishes Mlle. d'Erlange serves her as a sort of diversion, and that so many exterior manifestations leave her inmost thoughts in the greatest placidity, with a little insensibility of heart perhaps, which would be very well explained by her childhood without joy or tenderness.

Whatever it may be, it is better that it should be

so, and we are enlivening our last afternoons with the noble game of checkers.

This does not pass, however, without some storms animating the séances, for Mlle. Colette does not like to be beaten, and after the first lesson during which I had thought it my duty to treat her gently, as this was her first attempt, I returned to my habitual play, and I won five times out of six.

Her patience, which is short, vanished quickly under these conditions, and she became angry. At first she reddened, then she frowned a little, tapped the table nervously, and finally, when the case appeared desperate to her, mixed the game all up with one stroke of her hand. I leaned back then with majesty upon my cushions and gazed obstinately at the beams of the ceiling, until she capitulated, which was very soon. She arranged the pieces again, pushed the game near me, and murmured in a low voice : —

“It was too uninteresting so !” — Then, persuaded that this explained everything, she extended to me her closed hands that I might draw and see who should begin, and all went on again nearly in the same order.

Invariably at the commencement, I propose to give her some pieces, and invariably she refuses with an air of cold dignity, evidently finding her sweeps with her hand much more to her mind than this favor, and warmly insisting at the commencement of each game

that I shall play with her as with any other person, seriously, and without helping her.

I obey her, and at the end of five minutes, she stamps her feet; that's logic!

Just now, we were engaged in the struggle; I saw her running blindly into danger, and twice in succession in spite of myself, I swept off four victims at one blow. Judge of her state of mind! Her teeth bit her lower lip so severely that it became white, and she embraced all her positions with a glance as desperate as that of a swimmer who is losing ground.

Prudently, I was already withdrawing my fingers, foreseeing some formidable catastrophe; but things turned in another way, suddenly her forehead became clear, she loosened the rough pressure of her teeth, and with her finger upon one of her men, she proceeded to conduct him diagonally across the board, disarranging my own men in the passage, but without violence and without having the least appearance in the world of suspecting that she was acting contrary to rules. At the other side of the board she stopped, and very gravely said to me:—

“There you are!”

“How so? What are you doing?” I demanded.

“Why,” she replied with magnificent self-assurance, “I make a king! I should never have done it if I had gone on in that way, so have I taken another!”

There is always this same disregard for all barriers and all conventionalities, and this mercurial nature

would not be out of place in a tribe of free Indians, . . . I see her in her tent, with feathers in her hair, some flowering vines about her shoulders, and rivaling her wild goats in her leaps, and baptized by the enthusiastic tribe with the symbolical name of "The Singing Bird" or "The Flying Arrow."

In the meanwhile, "The Flying Arrow" continues her office of kind mistress of the house, and taxes her brain to amuse me.

Eight days ago, I got up. Aided by Benoite, whose robust shoulder served me for a cane, I reached the arm-chair which had been placed near the window. I rested my splints upon another chair opposite to me, and guided by Mlle. Colette, I made the acquaintance of the court-yard and the principal points of the château. "Here," she said to me, "is the library, here the dining-room, here the chapel, and there,"—showing me some ruins this time,— "there *were* some salons, a large hall, an oratory, and some endless galleries."

The whole, the ruins and all that remains intact, is superb; it is of the pure style of Louis XIII, elegant and severe at the same time, and there are sculptures which make me dream, and upon which I sincerely compliment the châtelaine of the place, who judges them and appreciates them with her customary originality.

When I have said that I have made the acquaintance of Françoise, the third friend of Mlle. Colette,

you will agree that the time has come for me to leave Erlange.

It was a superb day yesterday, very dry and clear; the window was partly open in spite of the sharp and biting air, and I breathed in the freshness with delight. Suddenly I saw my young nurse crossing the court-yard; she raised her head in passing, sent me a little salute with her hand, and ran to a door which opened upon the court.

"I wish to show you Françoise!" she cried to me.

And she came out an instant after with a great broken-winded beast, half blind, with projecting flanks, enormous withers, standing very high upon four spindle legs, and with a coat of yellowish white.

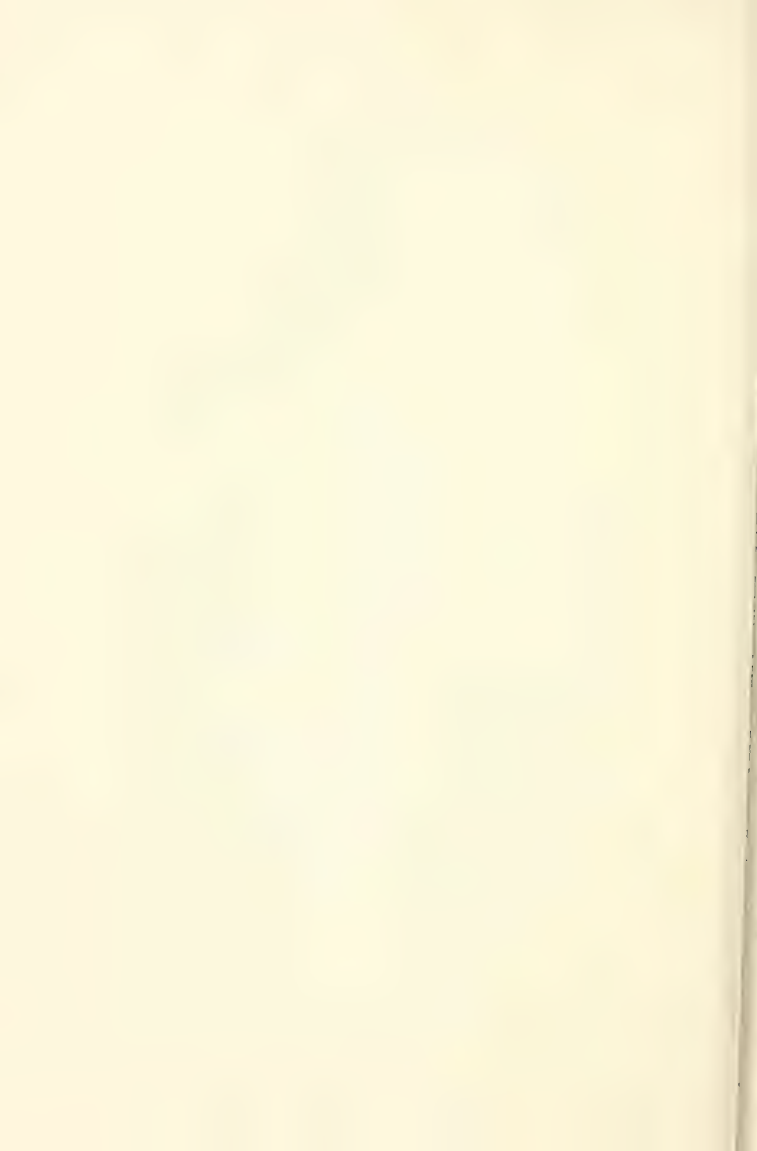
Very indifferent to this ugliness, she caressed her, spoke to her, and stuffed her with bread and sugar, all this with such rapidity that the teeth of the old beast could not masticate all that was presented to her. Then when she had finished:—

"Even now she does not trot badly, you shall see!" she said to me.

She threw a cloth upon the mare's back, led her near a flight of stone steps, sprang upon the massive croup like a sylph, and exciting her by her voice, started her at a trot. But the nag stumbled over all the pavings, jerked back her great head with fear, and, with her smoking nostrils, she resembled the



"SHE SENT ME A LITTLE SALUTE WITH HER HAND."



beast of the Apocalypse, carrying some spirit, in her irresolute course.

"You will break your neck at that game!" cried I to Mlle. d'Erlange.

"Nonsense!" she replied, "we understand each other too well."

At the tenth turn she allowed herself to glide so rapidly to the ground, that I thought she had fallen; then she led her friend back with the same expressions of tenderness which she had lavished upon her when she brought her out.

This is the way that she talks to animals, and I am no longer astonished that there is nothing left for men, she expends all her heart there.

According to all probabilities, I shall write to you no more until I go down to the village. I expect to remain there at the inn some days, long enough to come up here again, to thank my hostess and to go to my doctor's house, and to inform you of my plans.

Turn over the page then, we are at the end of the adventure, and until I see you again, farewell. I have lost so many boats now that it does not matter if another goes without me, and I have a desire to come and shake hands with you again in your retreat before my departure.

XXII.

APRIL 28.

ALL is over; M. de Civreuse went away yesterday, and I no longer recognize myself here.

Yet I have known Erlange silent and empty before; I know how my steps resound in the corridors and how my voice echoes from the wainscotings; but all is changed now.

It was only loneliness formerly, now it is sadness, and the two things weigh very differently.

From time to time I try to act as if I did not care, I play a comedy with myself. I run about, I put everything in order, I sing little gay airs, then I seat myself beside my dog, I take his head upon my knees and begin to talk to him as I used to do; only, even with him, I surprise myself in the very act of telling lies.

"Six weeks to heal a fracture, do you see, 'Un,' it is dreadful!" I said to him just now; "never could we have believed that it could take as long as that, could we?"

And it is not true, it is not at all true, for I had reckoned upon twice that length of time for the present, and upon more later on.

Benoîte follows me with an anxious eye. She suspects a little emotion or at least dreads it, and she

would willingly have me always near her; but that is not what I wish: I pretend to be busy in putting the things back into my room, and I escape.

In reality, I do nothing at all, and I leave everything as it was yesterday, for I no longer dare to go back to my old room. There are so many remembrances lying in ambush there, almost everywhere, and they jump out so quickly when I enter, that I have no desire to sleep there now. I should be afraid that all those apparitions would discover my secret, and would go away and relate it to M. Pierre, who would perhaps laugh; so I wish to come here only to dream. In the library I weep, I am regretful, I become angry, I do whatever the impulse suggests: then when I feel myself reasonable, it is the hour of recreation, I direct my steps to the familiar room, I seat myself in my usual place, I look at the empty bed, the easy-chair near the window with no one in it, and I give myself up to recollections!

Often also I feel myself overcome with anger. After all, what has this man come here for? why has he entered into my head and heart like this since he wished nothing of me? And what is it that sends you just that taste of happiness which you long for, which allows you to appreciate it, to look at it, and which, at the moment when you believe that you can close your hands upon it, snatches it quickly away?

Is that what is called Providence?

But yet one must be just: M. de Civreuse has done

nothing to attract my attention, and it is indeed his coldness, I believe, which has so charmed and bewitched me.

Grave as he was, yet he smiled sometimes, and there is a special magic in the smile of cold people. It is like the sun in winter, or like that aloe flower which M. Pierre told me about once, which blooms but once in a hundred years, and whose rarity makes it valuable. Why is it that I must busy myself with so rare a flower?

Our last day passed better than any other, and I would be unwilling to swear that even he did not feel some slight emotion.

In the morning, on entering at my customary hour, I found near his easy-chair a table covered with papers, a box of colors, and a bundle of pencils and brushes. Benoîte gave him a glass of water, and as soon as she had gone out he said to me quickly:—

“Would you be willing to permit me to make your portrait upon this album in two strokes of the pencil? I have just sketched this side of the château, but my souvenirs of Erlange would be incomplete if my nurse was not upon the first page.”

I replied “yes,” and drew near to see what he was holding, while asking him:—

“How shall I pose? Standing, sitting, in profile, or full face?”

And at the same time I tried all positions. . . .

He began to laugh, and after having reflected a moment:—

"If you are willing," he said, "you might seat yourself in this great easy-chair in front of the fireplace, as you were the evening of my first awakening here."

"Minus the gown, however!"

"Minus the gown, unfortunately!"

"Unfortunately? Do you wish me to go and put it on?"

"Oh! I would not dare." . . .

"But it will only take a second!"

And I was far away before he could finish his sentence.

As I had told him, an instant after I returned. Only, the skirt of this ancestor with whom I was unacquainted was very much too long for me; although I raised it with both hands, my feet caught in the hem, so that I advanced stumbling; and as at the end I let it go in order to make M. de Civreuse a stately courtesy, it happened that my feet somehow caught in it, and I fell heavily upon my knees.

M. Pierre uttered an exclamation, a kind of cry, *ma foi*, which gave me pleasure, and he made an impetuous movement as if to spring to his feet.

"Your knee!" cried I, "do not stir!" — Then I rose lightly, and seated myself in my chair. But he was anxious.

"You are not hurt, you are very sure of it?" he said to me. "What an absurd idea it was for me to have you put that on! Truly, you are not hurt?" I

replied: "No," my heart beating quickly, not from my fall, but on account of that anxious voice which was questioning me, and at the end of a quarter of an hour, which he gave me to allow me to recover myself, he began upon his work.

He painted on and on, raising his eyes and looking at me with a persistence which troubled me greatly, and making me rest, that is, move about, every fifteen minutes. Luncheon interrupted us; but at two o'clock it was completed. He called me to him then, and I could not help crying out at seeing the leaf which he presented to me:—

"It is I! Ah! but it is so pretty!"

The fact is that this little rose-colored lady who smiled at me from the easy-chair, this great dark fireplace where the andirons stood out so clearly, the sculptured wainscotings, all made a veritable picture, and I fell into deep admiration of it.

"Which is pretty?" asked M. de Civreuse of me, mockingly enough; "you or the water-color?"

"The portrait, of course!"

He looked at me a moment, smiling, then in a voice very different from any I had heard him use:—

"The portrait is you, for happily it resembles you. Change nothing in your exclamation."

I became silent; it was the second time that I had heard a compliment from his mouth, and it affected me more than I could have wished. Moreover, I was

dying to have, like him, some souvenir of this delightful time, which I felt was slipping through my fingers, and I sought nervously what to say and how to express myself.

"But if I also should make your portrait?" I commenced jokingly.

"Then," he replied seriously, "I should be charmed, and I will keep as still as a statue."

"But I do not draw very well," I stammered, very much confused at being taken at my word. "I have never made any portraits but 'Un's'."

"Ah, well!" said he, "I shall find myself in excellent company!"

He handed me a board, a sheet of paper, some charcoal and pencils, and posed for a three-quarters' face.

"Do I look well so?" he asked.

"Perfectly," I replied.

I was altogether disconcerted, and he had put out of my head all that I would have said.

Mechanically, however, I commenced, looking at him as I had seen him look at me, and finding him as handsome as I could have wished him to find me.

But at the end of a quarter of an hour I was tired out, nervous, and unable to continue. The face upon my paper resembled anything that one might desire to call it—a judge's wig, a scarecrow or a negro king, and I recalled my attempts of the

preceding winter, when I had amused myself in drawing my dog, and when in spite of all my efforts I had given my favorite the head of a sheep, the fur of a bear, and four slender legs which would not have supported a King Charles.

Upon any other occasion I should have laughed; but I was counting the minutes and always thinking of his departure, and that put my mind in a turmoil, and I felt the tears coming to my eyes. This was what I had sworn should not happen, and I ran to the fireplace and was going to throw my paper into the fire, saying:—

“It is impossible; I do not know how to do it!”

But M. de Civreuse stopped me.

“My portrait!” cried he; “show me my portrait. I have the right to see it!”

Without any resistance I brought it to him; he took it and contemplated it gravely, then, still with the same seriousness:—

“Will you permit me to retouch it for you?” said he.

I bent my head, and with a dash of his handkerchief he effaced it all. Then, with four strokes of a pencil he made a profile which was a caricature of himself, so ridiculously accurate that it was impossible to look at it without laughing.

He wrote underneath in his large hand: “The respectful homage of the patient to the author,” and handed it to me.

At the same time the doctor entered. My heart became suffocated; I understood that this was the end of it all; and as I went out of the room, I heard the carriage which had been ordered for M. de Civreuse, rolling into the court-yard. I fled to my refuge, and there with my drawing in my hand, I examined it more carefully. Only instead of laughing, as I had a moment before, my tears began to fall upon the misshapen nose and upon the bristling mustache which M. Pierre had made. And yet it was symbolical, for the caricature was like him, resembling my hero as the reality resembled my dream.

A moment after the doctor called me. M. de Civreuse was standing in the centre of the room, supported by two black crutches, which had a horrible effect upon me. It seemed to me that I had made him lame for the rest of his days; I felt that I was becoming pale, and involuntarily I turned towards the doctor extending both my hands.

"It is only for a few days," he said, smiling, for he understood my fear.

The splints which had replaced the plaster cast two weeks ago were upon the floor.

"Let us burn them together!" said M. de Civreuse, showing them to me.

I collected them, as he wished, and approached the fire with him.

He managed his crutches well, but the dull noise upon the floor troubled me so that I no longer knew

what I was doing. The doctor had gone out to call Benoîte, and I threw upon the logs the first piece, then the second.

At the third, I took courage, and raising my eyes to M. de Pierre, I contrived to pronounce very low but without trembling:—

“Do you pardon me?”

“Ah! Mademoiselle,” cried he, “I hoped that there would never be a question of that kind between us!”

I thanked him with a motion of my head, and continued my work without saying anything more. I was on my knees before the fire, almost at his feet, while he, standing, leaning against the mantle, towered above me to his full height. . . . How different it was from that I had imagined it would be one day!

However, Benoîte entered. She came to say farewell to the traveller, and advanced making a courtesy, complimented him on his appearance, wished him better luck, and hoped that God would bless him!

He allowed her to go on until the end; then, laying aside his crutches and leaning his bad knee upon the seat of an easy-chair:—

“It is not with mere words that I can thank you for all your devotion,” said he, gayly; “you must allow me to kiss you.”

And taking my poor old nurse, stupefied at his

words, by the shoulders, he kissed her upon both cheeks, in a very frank and friendly way, . . . Then, as the doctor called from below: "Hurry, Monsieur, or we shall not get there before nightfall!" he turned towards me: —

"Our excellent doctor has been willing to charge himself with my adieus to Mlle. d'Épine," he said: "I should not have liked to impose this trouble upon you!" He hesitated a little, then more slowly, as though picking his words, he added: "Permit me, Mademoiselle, to express to you my most sincere gratitude, not only for your care, but also for the grace and cheerfulness with which you have enlivened the monotony of the sick room. It was doubly kind in you to do this."

I extended to him my hand, incapable of speaking, for there was a peculiar tightness in my throat as if some invisible person were squeezing it with all his might. He took my hand, hesitated a moment as he had done before speaking, then very rapidly he bent down and pressed his lips upon it. . . . I had never before experienced such a sensation, and it was so strange and unexpected that the tears came to my eyes.

When I looked up again, he was near the door, and Benoîte followed him with his travelling-bag. He descended the stairs hastily and very adroitly, got into the carriage without saying a word, and as the horse started, he leaned his head out, took off his hat and said very gravely: —

"Farewell, Mademoiselle!"

I felt as if some one was sealing my heart in stone just as they enclose novices in coffins when they take the veil at the convent, and I thought of the drift in which one winter's day I very nearly fell asleep forever. Why was I not left there?

As long as the carriage was in sight, I remained upon the threshold; then when it had disappeared:—

"Come in and warm yourself!" said Benoite, who was looking at me.

"Yes," I replied, "I am coming."

But I fled to the depths of the park, near the pine-tree where I had engraved his name some days before.

The new sap which was just beginning to run escaped through the cuts, and each of the letters of his name wept. I leaned my head against the cold bark; at the right and at the left all the thickets, still white in places, were closed; I was alone! I pressed myself against these friends, who so lent themselves to my grief, and in silence wept like them.

PIERRE TO JACQUES.

I am writing to you now from the village inn; I have been here two days already.

I cannot say that it is as good as my nest at Erlange, or that I have a bed with twisted columns and a Louis XIII fireplace. The small beams of my chamber are smoky and the walls are whitewashed.

so well whitewashed, indeed, that all my clothes bear traces of it, and my sleeves are like those of a miller well covered with the signs of his work when he comes forth from his mill.

But what would you have ! A traveller must expect that, and one cannot have at each stage of his journey a seigniorial hostelry.

What is better is, that my knee grows daily stronger. I use my crutches with the dexterity of a disabled soldier, and I would go out oftener if a string of gamins did not form themselves into an escort as soon as I put my nose outside.

A happy country is this village, where a cripple can be the subject of such curiosity, and where they crowd up to see me pass on my crutches ! The species is rare, it appears.

To amuse myself, I sketch at hap-hazards. The end of a clock tower here, a cloud there, and a sheep grazing upon the cloud. It is the height of fantasy, but my sketches are not for the exposition, and I will not offer to it what would please it better perhaps, that is, the portrait of Mlle. d'Erlange, a head, quarter the natural size, and which is not badly done, *ma foi* ! Have I told you that I asked her to pose for me, and that she was very willing to put on the grandmother's gown for the occasion, the one which she had worn the first evening I spent with her ? Evidently not, since I left off writing to you three days before my departure.

Ah, well ! Monday morning when I was to leave Erlange, I remembered my intention to try to sketch this fantastic head, and I have succeeded in it better than I could have hoped. It was very quickly done, for this water-color is only a rough sketch ; but I believe that she would lose in grace all that she would gain in finish, and so I leave it as it is. One sketches a smile ; one does not fix it by $A+B$, above all a smile like that ; the resemblance is good ; taking into account the colors, and modesty apart, it is a little masterpiece !

You shall see it ; it is worth the trouble of a journey, and I will bring it to you in order to have your opinion of it.

Half laughingly and half seriously, Mlle. d'Erlange wished to pay me a like courtesy, and she made the most frightful little daub that you can imagine, which leads me to think that she never liked drawing, since she practises it in this way.

And it is thus that our last hours passed, talking and laughing as if the wheels of the carriage which awaited me were not sounding upon the pavement of the court-yard.

Upon a log, "solemn and expiatory," we burned together the splints which imprisoned me for so many days, and the farewells commenced. Unquestionably, the most affected of us three was Benoitte, whom I kissed squarely upon both cheeks, and who would have shed a little tear, I think ; but what

can one do in the midst of individuals of our calibre ? Our cold-bloodedness froze her.

Then I took leave of Mlle. Colette with a very courteous little compliment, very pretty, which she received, however, without saying a word.

Then she extended her hand, and slash went the coachman!

Do you regret now the declaration which you had proposed for the last word, and do you see the absurdity of the situation: a man speaking of love, heating himself, supplicating, laying his soul bare to obtain at the moment of farewell a word or a look, and be received by bursts of laughter from a foolish head and a dry heart. For she would have laughed, I will wager!

In truth, never was I more satisfied that I had outgrown the time and the taste for protestations of that nature: and my heart was very calm, very peaceful, like that of a brave warrior retired from glory, who has obtained his discharge. This made me sleep without dreaming, even upon a straw mattress, and it is something to be assured of a good sleep.

My adieux to Mlle. d'Épine will be made by proxy. The doctor is the one who devotes himself to the task; and as for "Un," I do not speak of him to you, for did not some one say long ago that, "*ce qu'il y a de mieux dans l'homme, c'est le chien!*"

With this I leave you! It is the hour when the cattle stray about the village while their stables are

made ready ; it is my amusement to see them pass, and I get from them some superb sketches. . . .

PIERRE TO JACQUES.

You do not believe me, do you, Jacques? You have seen what is the matter, and you know that for a month I have lied to you, to my mind, to my heart, to everything indeed, even to this love which entirely possesses me, and which I conceal, as if this happiness not to be equalled of loving madly was a thing to be ashamed of.

Yes, I love her! I adore her! and the bravado which I sent this morning is the last. Are you glad?

My letter had but just gone when I called back the child who carried it; I wished to stop it, to take it back; my pride was lowered to the ground, and vanished so completely that I could not find a trace of it, and I wondered what this idiotic feeling was, which had prevented me for some weeks from confessing that I loved, because forsooth I had formerly vowed a hatred to the entire human race, because I had closed my heart by writing above it: "*De profundis!*" and because this sudden defeat brought about by a young girl hurt my pride!

It is always upon the garland of flowers in the fairy tales that the sharpest swords are broken! This time it is an eighteen-year-old smile, which has made havoc of all my distastes, and of all my distrust.

And I, like a fool, instead of rejoicing at it, wished to continue to doubt, because this pedestal of disdain and scepticism flattered my vanity, and increased my height in my own eyes !

I disgust you ! But you see clearly, Jacques, that I am ready with all expiations, and that if my heart is in the skies, my forehead is on the ground. . . . What more can you desire ?

Yes, I believe that youth has come back, for I feel that I am twenty years old once more this evening, and that my illusions are here also ! I believe in everything, even in good ! but I believe above all in love, and you need not complain of it, for it contains everything, wisdom and folly.

In good faith, my friend, do you believe that for two days I have been drawing sheep upon clouds and countrywomen in their striped skirts ? The truth is that I have just now torn up the twentieth letter that I have written to her since yesterday, and I shall commence another immediately ; and if I do not succeed in placing before her the follies which my heart suggests, and in language sufficiently plain and emphatic, I shall go up this evening to Erlange ; I shall kneel before her in the great room where I have known her, and tell her that I adore her.

You speak of my crutches ! My crutches ! Jacques, I have made a great bonfire of them, a fire upon which I have thrown all my doubts and all my past days, that I may remember only to-day and to-morrow ;

and as for this mountain, do you not think that the wings of my love are sufficient to surmount it ?

How I should like to have you know her ! Have I really described her to you in my moroseness, and have you understood that these follies and this childishness of which I complained are perhaps what I love best in her ? It needed just this originality and this freshness to awaken again my youth and my benumbed life, like new perfumes which resemble no others, and which penetrate even the most deadened senses.

It is a wild and charming flower which has grown there for me between the earth and the sky, and grown for me alone, which has loved until now only the stars and dreams, which the mountain breeze alone has caused to bloom, and which unites in itself all the graces of the woman with the freshness of Nature herself.

With her hand in one of mine, and thine in the other, the world is filled for me, and my happiness is so great that there is only one thing which can be compared to it, and that is infinity !

* * * * *

Think of me this evening, Jacques ; I am going to climb up the mountain, I can no longer remain down here ; I am thirsty for the air of Erlange ! If it is necessary for me to write instead of speaking, ah, well ! I will find some corner in the ruins in which to shelter myself, and to trace some words of

love; does it require more than this moonlight for that! . . .

I send you her portrait, I wish you to see her: to-morrow the original will be mine, or you may keep this forever, for this would be my greatest legacy. . .

XXIII.

APRIL 30.

MON DIEU! my happiness is too great, too sudden, it crushes me! Help me to know how to bear it! This was my cry at the first moment, and then half an hour later I no longer knew that I had wept; and my joy had so permeated my being that I no longer remembered that it had not always been there!

Yesterday, I think it was nearly ten o'clock in the evening, I was sitting all alone in M. de Civreuse's room;—I call it so still,—and doing nothing, with my hands upon my knees, I was dreaming.

Benoite had been gone a long time; there was not a breath about me, and I felt so alone that the sound of my own movements made me tremble with fear.

Suddenly, without, upon the road from the village, the stones began to roll, and I heard distinctly the footstep of a man.

My heart began to beat so loudly that I counted its pulsations. "Some delayed countryman," said I to myself. "A peddler who is returning home." But when he was under my window, the man stopped, and my emotion became so great that I grasped the wood of my chair so tightly that the print of it was left upon the palms of my hands.

"It is he!" I said to myself.

He! who? M. de Civreuse, who went away day before yesterday upon his crutches! It was impossible! And yet, at the end of a moment, a voice low but vibrating came up to me, a voice that I knew so well, and I heard some one say:—

"Do not be afraid!"

If he had demanded my life, I could have neither spoken nor moved. I remained a second in suspense, then a stone, as large as a nut, came through one of the little window-panes, and rolled to my feet.

Around this was folded a paper, and recovering from my shock, I took it.

The writing of M. de Civreuse covered both sides, and this is what I read:—

"Colette, forgive me for the folly of this note, and forgive me above all for the foolish way in which I send it to you; but, are we not both very unlike the rest of the world?

"Besides, Erlange is an enchanted castle at this hour in the evening; everything is closed, and there is no place where I should dare to knock.

"Benoite sleeps, I am sure, and there burns here only one lamp, which I know so well, for it is towards this point, of which my heart makes a star, that I have walked for two hours.

"Had it been placed at a greater distance and even higher, I should have gone up to it to-night, for I could not have waited for the day to come, because of

this word which I am just going to say to you — it has been in my heart and on my lips for a long time already; for six weeks I have repeated it very low morning and evening; I have murmured many times that I adored you without your ever hearing it, and now I am going to utter it so loud that it will penetrate not only your ears, but the very depths of your being.

“I love you. . . . But I do not care to tell you how I love you; I wish to see your smile and to look into your eyes while I say it, and I do not mean to lose a single expression of your beauty. I have learned what it costs to pass two days away from you!

“Now do not say to me that you do not wish for my love, and that you refuse this life and all of this passion which I lay at your feet. . . . Have you never thought then, my poor child, how easy it would be for a resolute man to come on a night like this in the midst of this solitude, and seize you and carry you away so far that no trace of you could ever be found again?

“Moreover, I firmly believe that there are some things which are written in heaven for all eternity. They are rare, but they are perfect, for God himself has written them, and our marriage is among the number.

“Colette, in this road where one day you threw me on my knees, without meaning it, I now await your reply, just as you found me one winter’s morning.

"Forgive me for the window-pane which I am going to break; it is the sacrificial window, I believe, and I choose it purposely, for I have a superstitious feeling that it is by this road that my happiness has come to me. . . .

"When we go away together, if I have the joy of taking you away, I shall carry with you that little statue, which you know of, and to which I have vowed a passionate gratitude, for without it, Colette, I should have passed by!"

As I read, an ardent joy filled my heart, and I could not believe in the reality of this happiness. Was it possible? Was it indeed he? Was this really I? What, he loved me! He had loved me for a long time! My dream was accomplished, and all my suffering would pass away like a shadow.

At the same time I was surprised at his long silence. Why had he delayed? And what reason had he for leaving me to cry thus?

Then with this happy emotion, the old self revived in me, and all the mischievous follies which my tears had drowned for two days, shook out their wings and flew up together.

They were compassionate when I wept and had drawn aside discreetly; but this hour of joy was theirs, they claimed it, and came flocking back, each armed with the old tantalizing spirit.

"Say yes, immediately!" counselled my heart pitifully. "Never!" cried the others. "Do not forget

our plans, Colette; he must suffer, do not show your hand too quickly!"

So that I no longer knew which to listen to, and I laughed with tears in my eyes, resembling those days when the skies were uncertain, and the rain falls in the midst of sunshine. . . . Fine weather or a storm, one cannot tell which.

However, I walked to the window and opened it. At the noise made by the fastening, a silhouette outlined on the darkness of the night made a quick movement. I could see him only indistinctly, for I was myself placed in the clear light and he was in the shade. I imagined, however, that he was going to speak and I leaned out; but the strangeness of an explanation at that distance struck me suddenly so forcibly, that my gayety carried me away: —

"M. de Civreuse," I cried, "are you upon your knees?"

He only replied: "Colette, answer me, I implore you!"

I had not reckoned upon this tone. As he wished, it penetrated my inmost being; and troubled, confused, no longer finding a word to say, I began to repeat mechanically the phrase I had in my mind a moment before: —

"Because I have sworn to leave you there a long time, because . . ."

"Because?" he repeated anxiously.

"Because I have waited such a very long time!"

But he did not hear: I had spoken too low, and moreover, my voice trembled too much.

He waited a second longer, then he called to me in that same tone which had impressed me so strongly.

I was incapable of replying and I saved myself by crying:—

“Wait!”

In my note-book there yet remained two white pages: I tore one of them out, and in haste, without reflecting, wrote this:—

“Do not carry me off, M. de Civreuse, that would bring you into trouble with the courts of justice. I fear: and besides, there is no retreat where any one could keep me if I did not wish it!

“I will tell you something that is surer than bolts: it is that wherever you take me, there my heart will be!

“Be certain that I shall not forget my St. Joseph: he has done for me far more than you think: and there is a certain old woman also to whom I am under obligations, and of whom I will tell you, since you like to be grateful.

“It is a story which I will relate to you some evening in the moonlight like this, first because I like this light, then, because if happiness came to you one morning in winter, it has just come to me on an evening in spring!”

PIERRE TO JACQUES.

Jacques, we are engaged ! give me your hand ; by following me you will enter into Paradise !

The curé of Fond-de-Vieux has consented to come up here and marry us ; the workmen are in the chapel and are restoring it in all haste ; it will be ready in three weeks, and we shall have the flowers of June to embalm the air.

How I have procured the consent of Mlle. d'Épine I no longer know, and I am not certain that I did not employ violence ; therefore she has revenged herself, and under the pretense of the proprieties she no longer leaves us alone.

As comrades and strangers, we were free ; as betrothed and very nearly married, she watches over us, and this woman is my torment ! I thought at first of breaking my other leg, but now I teach Colette to speak Latin. . . .

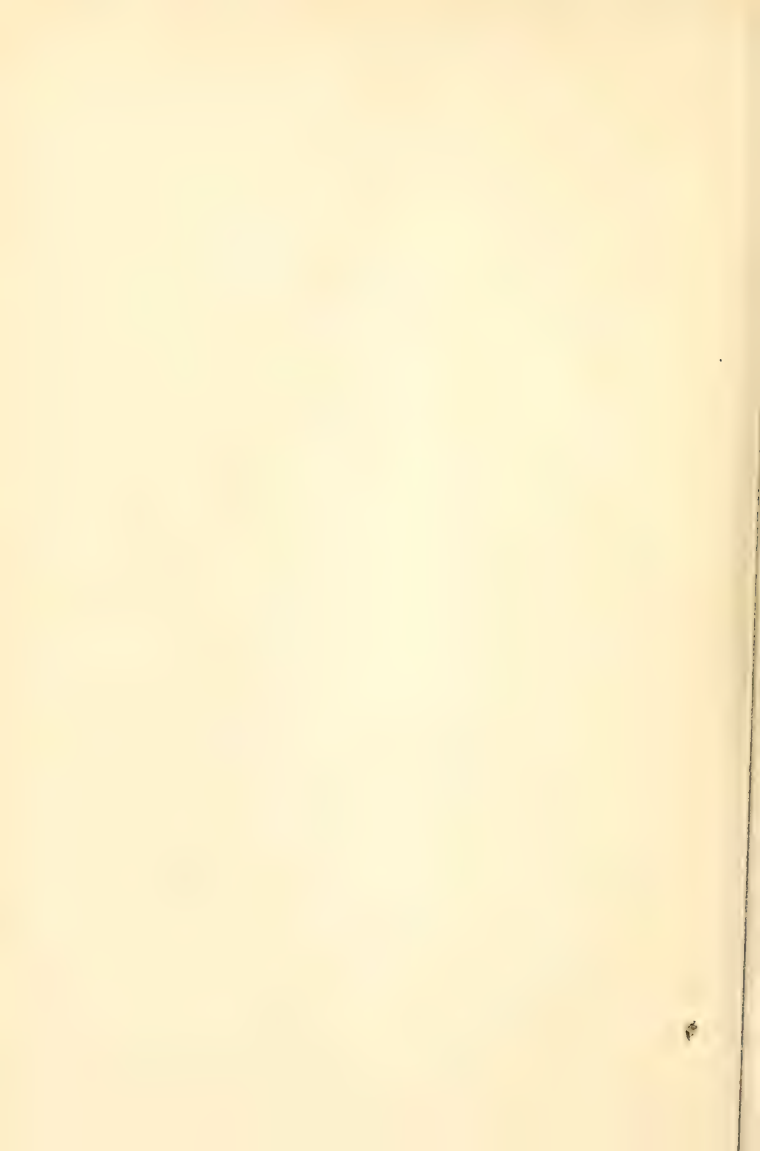
It is not necessary for us to have a very extensive repertoire, for the word we repeat is always the same !

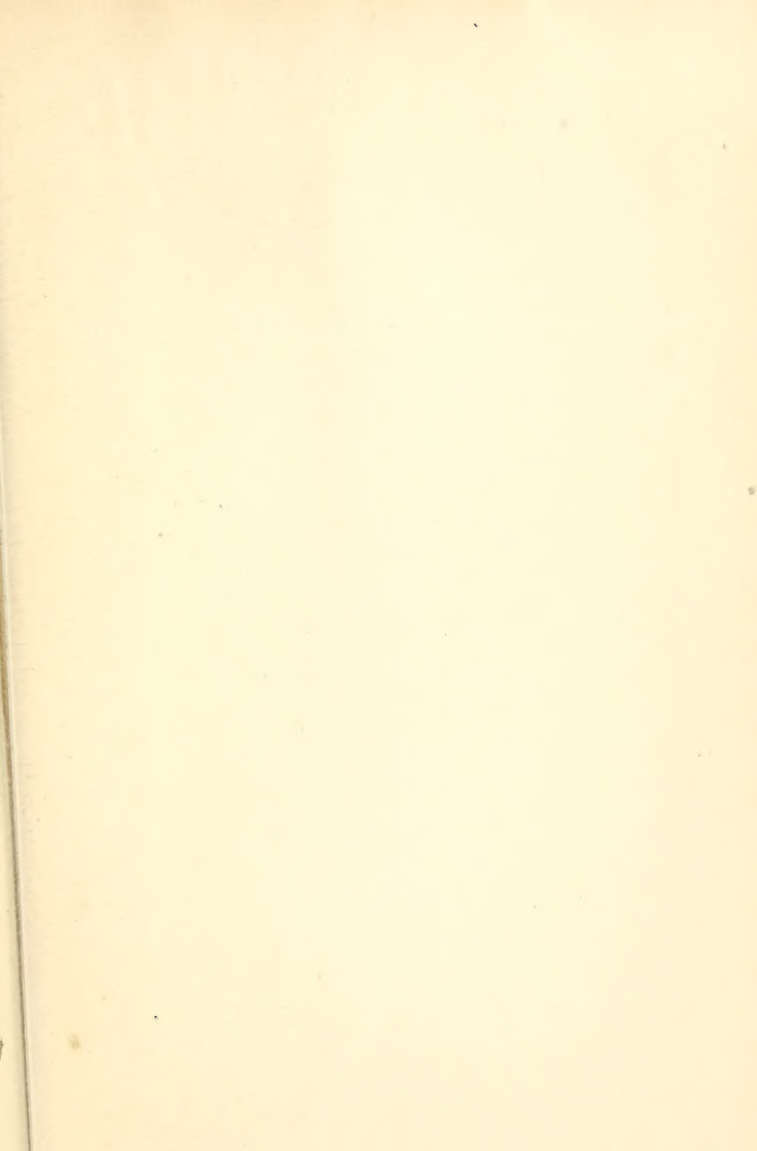
On the evening of our marriage, faithful to one of my plans, I shall carry her away, if not to the Indies, at least higher up than Erlange. Goatherds sometimes pass by here, and I wish no one to look into my Eden !

In the autumn I think all will be ready. We will restore our ruins, and you must choose your

apartments some of these days, in the crumbling towers or elsewhere; all is open to you.

There is only one place which nothing shall ever change: you guess it, and you will keep guard over it, my friend, if you come to replace me sometimes during my absence: it is the great room, wainscoted in oak, where Benoitte and my doctor brought me one day unconscious.





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